A Thousand Clowns Study Guide

A Thousand Clowns by Herb Gardner

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.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

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". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

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". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

Contents

A Thousand Clowns Study Guide....1

Contents....2

Introduction....4

Author Biography....5

Plot Summary....6

Act 1, Part 1....9

Act 1, Part 2....11

Act 1, Part 3....13

Act 2, Part 1....16

Act 2, Part 2....19

Act 2, Part 3....21

Act 3, Part 1....23

Act 3, Part 2....25

Characters....28

Themes....32

Style....34

Historical Context....36

Critical Overview....38

Criticism....39

Critical Essay #1....40

Adaptations....44

Topics for Further Study....45

Compare and Contrast....46

What Do I Read Next?....47

Further Study....48

Bibliography.. 49

Copyright Information.. 50

Introduction

The play tells the story of Murray Burns, a cheerful eccentric raising his nephew, a twelve-year-old genius, in New York City. Murray believes in living life fully, even if that means going to the movies instead of looking for a job. When social workers from the Bureau of Child Welfare come to investigate, he must decide whether to accept some level of conformity in order to show himself a fit guardian. The play is episodic and funny, as Murray meets all challenges to his lifestyle with irreverent humor. The text is available in *Herb Gardner: The Collected Plays*, published in paperback in 2001 by Applause Books.

Author Biography

Herbert Gardner was born in Brooklyn, New York, on December 28, 1934. His grandfather owned a neighborhood bar, the Silver Gate, in Manhattan's Lower East Side. Gardner attended the High School of Performing Arts in New York City and then the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh and Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, where he studied sculpture and drama. Gardner's Jewish heritage and his experiences listening to conversations in his father's bar provided background for several of his plays and characters.

A man of many interests and abilities, Gardner wanted to be a sculptor but did not think he would be able to make a living at it. In the 1950s, he drew a comic strip called *The Nebbishes* for the *Chicago Tribune*. The strip became popular and was widely syndicated. The income from the strip and related merchandise made it possible for Gardner to act on his dissatisfaction, like Murray Burns, and end his career. Turning his attention to writing longer works, in 1958 he published his first and only novel, *A Piece of the Action*. This was followed by his first full-length play, *A Thousand Clowns*, which opened at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre on Broadway on April 5, 1962. In recognition of the play, Gardner was named the "promising playwright of 1961—62" by the New York Drama Critics.

Over the next forty years, Gardner had a relatively small but significant output. He wrote one-act plays, and five more full-length plays, including *I'm Not Rappaport*, which won the 1986 Tony Award for best play. All of his longer plays were produced on Broadway. He wrote the screenplay for the film version of *A Thousand Clowns* (1965), and five more screenplays based on his work. He also wrote television plays, short stories, reviews and columns. He died of lung disease on September 24, 2003, in New York City.

Plot Summary

Act 1

Before the lights come up on *A Thousand Clowns*, the voice of Chuckles the Chipmunk, an inane children's television host, can be heard in the darkness, carrying on a perky conversation about "Chuckle-Chip Dancing" with a screaming crowd of children. The curtain goes up to reveal the cluttered one-room apartment of Murray Burns, every surface covered with clocks, broken radios, hats and other items. Although it is 8:30 on a Monday morning, the only light in the apartment is the light from the television, as Nick, Murray's nephew, watches the *Chuckles the Chipmunk* show. Murray, who has just gotten out of bed, enters from the kitchen with a cup of coffee, and the two begin their day.

Murray is a free spirit with an offbeat sense of humor. He phones the weather service to get the day's forecast and carries on an extended conversation with the recorded message on the other end. He has been unemployed for several months, having quit his job as a writer for *Chuckles the Chipmunk* because he fears becoming trapped in normal middle-class life. Although he has been promising Nick that he will look for a new job, he has no intention of doing so today, because he is celebrating the birthday of Irving R. Feldman, the owner of his favorite delicatessen. Nick, who is twelve, has decided to skip school in honor of the occasion as well. Clearly, Murray and Nick are fond of each other, and just as clearly, Murray has unconventional ideas about raising children. Nick, in some ways the more mature of the two, warns Murray that they are about to be visited by a social worker from the Bureau of Child Welfare. Murray promises to behave himself and considers again the possibility of looking for a job, but the prospect depresses him. Instead, he suggests a trip to the Statue of Liberty.

Before Murray and Nick can leave, they find at the door Albert Amundson, a social worker, and Sandra Markowitz, a psychologist, both from the Bureau of Child Welfare. Murray has been ignoring their phone calls and letters for eleven months, and they have come to see whether he is a fit guardian for Nick. Murray answers their serious questions with jokes and non sequiturs. Albert is earnest and stuffy, and he has no appreciation for Murray's whimsical sense of humor. Sandra, on the other hand, finds Murray and Nick charming.

Murray and Nick truly are charming. They show off by guessing where Albert and Sandra grew up, based on their accents. Nick can also do imitations of Peter Lorre and James Cagney, famous movie actors from the 1940s and 1950s. Sandra is impressed by Nick's intelligence, but Albert refuses to be distracted from his list of prepared questions. Sandra draws Nick aside to talk, and Nick does his best to tell her what he thinks she wants to hear about "educational-type magazines" and "wholesome and constructive-type games." When asked about his favorite toy, Nick produces an electric statue of a topless hula dancer whose breasts light up. Nick has an ironic appreciation for how tacky the statue is, but Albert and Sandra try to establish deep psychological

meanings for it. Murray explains that Nick's mother, Murray's sister, abandoned Nick years before. She never even gave her son a name. "Nick" is just a name the boy is trying out; he is to choose a permanent name when he turns thirteen in a few weeks. Sandra can see the humor in the way Murray and Nick live and in the inadequacy of the investigators' probing, but Albert cannot. When Albert asks Sandra to be quiet and let him complete the investigation, the two quarrel, and Albert leaves, threatening to have Nick placed in foster care.

With Albert gone, Sandra begins to cry. She knows she is not well suited for her job, because she becomes too involved with the people she is studying. She is romantically involved with Albert, but she knows that the relationship is also hopeless. She is worried about Murray and Nick and their chances for staying together. Nick is disappointed, but not surprised, that Murray was unable to behave during the interview. To cheer everyone up, Murray picks up his ukulele and begins to sing an old song, "Yes, Sir, That's My Baby." Soon Nick picks up his own ukulele and joins in the rousing performance, complete with dance steps. Before the song is over, Nick looks thoughtfully at Murray and Sandra, sees that they are acting like a couple, and grabs his pajamas so he can spend the night with a neighbor.

Act 2

Act 2 opens in Murray's apartment the next morning, where Sandra has spent the night. While Sandra is getting dressed, Murray's brother Arnold stops by with his daily delivery of a bag of fruit. Arnold is also Murray's agent, and he tells Murray that he has two job prospects for him. Arnold knows that the Child Welfare Bureau is investigating Murray, and he wants to help him get a job so he will look more reliable. Murray refuses to discuss work, and Arnold leaves.

When Sandra emerges, they have a few moments of tension before they realize they are both happy about their night together. As Sandra delights in her new-found independence and spontaneity, Alfred returns to the apartment. He informs Murray that a hearing will be held in two days to determine whether he may continue as Nick's guardian. When Alfred leaves, Murray tries to convince Sandra that Nick would be better off in foster care. He is unable to convince Sandra□or himself□that he is indifferent to Nick. Instead, he heads off to buy a new suit and get a job.

The next scene takes place in Arnold's office, where Arnold is talking on a speakerphone with Leo Herman, also known as Chuckles the Chipmunk. They are negotiating a new offer for Murray, who is on an interview with another man named Sloan. Leo wants Murray back, but only if Murray can be more respectful. Murray comes into the office and reports that he has not taken the other job because "Sloan is an idiot." He has decided to work with Leo again. But while talking with Leo, Murray is unable to hide his dislike. He tosses the speaker phone in the wastebasket while Leo is talking and storms out.

The third scene is back in Murray's apartment, but it is an apartment transformed. Sandra has been tidying and redecorating, putting all of the broken clocks and radios in boxes, and adding new bedspreads and pillows. Nick arrives and is pleasantly surprised to see Sandra still there and to see the changes she has made. The two chat in a friendly way. Murray comes home in a cheerful mood, but Sandra slowly realizes that he has not gotten a job and that Nick will have to leave. Disappointed with Murray, she leaves, too.

Act 3

About thirty minutes later, act 3 finds Murray alone in his apartment, which he has restored to its original chaotic condition. Arnold comes in and tries to have a serious conversation with Murray about the future. Murray accuses Arnold of having given up all of his youthful dreams, but Arnold insists that he is content with his job, his home, his wife, his children. He refuses to apologize for not living like Murray and proclaims "I am the best possible Arnold Burns."

Arnold leaves and Nick comes in. He proudly announces that since Murray has gone out and gotten a job, he has decided to complete his own unfinished business: he has decided to take "Murray Burns" as his permanent name. Murray is touched by this but tries to convince the boy to choose another name.

Leo arrives to try to talk Murray into coming back to work. Leo is a pathetic figure; he is neither warm nor particularly funny, and it bothers him that he cannot get Nick to like him. The more he tries to amuse Nick, the duller he appears. As Nick sees how empty a man Leo is, he understands why Murray does not want to work for him, and he tries to chase Leo away with another chorus of "Yes, Sir, That's My Baby." But Murray knows now that he loves Nick, and he will do what he has to do to keep Nick with him. He quiets Nick and accepts Leo's job offer. He will be back to work in the morning. Leo leaves, and Sandra returns. She hints at ideas for fixing up the apartment again, and Nick encourages her. For now, the three are a family, and Nick and Sandra will unite to keep Murray in line. Murray resignedly accepts his fate, and the curtain comes down.

BOOKRAGS

Act 1, Part 1

Act 1, Part 1 Summary

A man who uses humor as a defense against real feeling, personal vulnerability, and genuine relationships is the central character of this play, which tells the story of how he is confronted by several different aspects of reality and realizes that his tendency to make jokes is actually hindering him from living a successful life.

Before the play begins, we hear the sound of a children's television show, "Chuckles the Chipmunk," featuring the childlike central character playing with a group of screaming youngsters. As the lights come up, we see a 12-year-old-boy, Nick, watching the show on television and commenting on how bad it is.

Murray enters, barely awake and making jokes about the kids on the TV actually being in the living room. His conversation with Nick reveals that Nick is extremely intelligent for his age, that Murray used to write for the Chuckles the Chipmunk program, and that he and Nick have an established morning routine. This consists of smoking cigarettes for Murray, making a telephone call to a pre-recorded weather announcement, complaining about the non-view outside the window, shouting down at the neighbors, and uttering constant wisecracks. At one point Murray asks why Nick isn't in school, and Nick reminds him that he said it was a holiday, Irving R. Feldman's birthday.

Murray explains that Feldman is a delicatessen owner and that he (Murray) is the only one who celebrates it. Nick says he figured he'd better stay home anyway because he needs to talk to Murray about a situation at school. He says that as a result of some unusual things he's said and done in class, all of which have been inspired by experiences he's had with Murray, he was sent to see the school psychologist. While there, he discovered he's got a large file, that Murray has been ignoring letters from Child Welfare, and that their representatives are going to check up on them. Murray asks why Nick hasn't told him this before, and Nick says they haven't seen each other for a couple of days because he's been staying with the upstairs neighbor. Murray says he's been working, but Nick points to a nearby bureau and says that last night's "work" left her gloves behind. After Murray comments on how bright Nick is, Nick says they'd better get some kind of story together for when Child Welfare comes and suggests that Murray get dressed and shaved.

As Murray begins to put on some clothes, Nick suggests that one of the things Child Welfare will need to know is whether Murray has been looking for work. Murray says he went job hunting all the week before but couldn't find anything. Nick then goes through the want ads of a 3-day-old paper and suggests several jobs, all of which Murray rejects. Nick comments that, in his opinion, Murray doesn't really want a job, and then, in extremely adult language, talks about how bad the situation is and how it will affect him when he grows up. Murray seems to want to laugh at the way Nick is talking, but then realizes he's serious and acknowledges that yes, the situation is bad for both of

them. He confesses that when he was supposedly looking for work he was actually at the movies, and he delivers a long and occasionally poetic speech about his experiences that concludes with the statement that he was there to escape reality. His speech seems to have brought him down, and Nick, in an attempt to cheer him up, suggests that they visit the Statue of Liberty. As they're getting ready to go, there's a knock on the door.

Act 1, Part 1 Analysis

The central dramatic action of this play is shaped by Murray's journey of transformation, meaning that the main purpose of this opening section is to indicate who he is at the beginning of that journey. Characteristics to note include his lack of a job, his apparently casual relationships with women as represented by the forgotten gloves, and his equally apparent disregard for authority as represented by the letters from Child Welfare. All are manifestations of a central defining characteristic, and all will change as a result of his journey.

Two aspects of his character don't change. The first is his very open relationship with Nick, who is a steadying influence throughout the play and who provides the ultimate motivation for Murray to complete his journey. The second is his tendency to crack jokes at every available opportunity, a personality trait that functions on one level to generate humor in a situation that might otherwise be fairly serious, and on another level creates several dramatic incidents in which cracking a joke gets him into trouble. On a more significant level, his humor is the primary illustration of that previously mentioned defining character trait: his avoidance of reality.

Throughout this section, and indeed throughout the play, Murray uses humor to deflect confrontation and to make fun of himself, of anyone with whom he's in conflict, or of life in general, all of which enables him to evade responsibility for himself or for his situation. His reasons for behaving this way are illuminated by his speech about going to the movies, which suggests in its conclusion that he finds reality too frightening to face. In other words, he's scared and doesn't want to deal with it. In this scene, then, at the beginning of his journey of transformation, Murray is defined as a kind of clown, someone who uses humor as a mask to avoid facing not only external reality, but also his own emotions.

Act 1, Part 2

Act 1, Part 2 Summary

Nick opens the door and Albert and Sandra, representatives from Child Welfare who've come to gather information about Nick's home life, enter. Murray clears away the chairs, and Nick exits to make coffee. Albert, speaking very formally, explains that because Murray has avoided dealing with both phone calls and letters from the office, the file on Nick is incomplete. He repeatedly suggests that Nick should be asked to leave so that Sandra's questions relating to the psychology of the case and Albert's questions about Murray's circumstances can be asked and answered openly. While Albert is speaking, Murray is making jokes and flirting with Sandra, and Nick is preparing and bringing in coffee, all of which flusters Albert.

As Albert and Sandra ask their questions, Murray and Nick play an apparently habitual game in which they try to guess where people come from by their speech. They correctly identify Sandra's background, which leads her to ask whether they play these kinds of games often. As Nick answers that they play several intelligence-challenging games together, Albert tries to get the conversation back on track. Nick analyzes his speech, Murray says he's probably gotten it right, and then as Albert is trying once again to get the interview going, Arnold enters, dropping off a bag of fruit. Just as quickly as he comes he's gone, and Murray explains that Arnold is his brother, and he leaves a bag of fruit with them every day. Albert comments that as part of their investigations they've actually spoken with his brother and also with his previous employers. When Murray becomes resentful, Albert explains that he's avoided answering their usual inquiries, remarks that he's been out of work for 5 months, and asks why he left his job. Murray says he realized it was time to go when he started talking to regular adults using the language that Chuckles the Chipmunk uses to talk to the children in his audience.

As Murray makes more jokes, Sandra reminds him firmly about how serious the situation is. Nick says his home life is great, Murray apologizes, and Sandra settles down to a conversation with Nick. Her questions are fairly obvious attempts at psychological analysis that Nick and Murray both see through and make jokes about. Albert tries to get Nick to be serious, and Sandra tells him to let her handle this. She then continues her questioning, asking whether Nick has any particular toys with which he likes to play. Nick brings out Bubbles, a 2-foot high plastic statue of a hula dancer whose hips wiggle and whose breasts light up when she's turned on. As Sandra continues her conversation with Nick, asking whether Bubbles reminds him in any way of his mother, Albert becomes fixed on Bubbles' breasts, fighting to stay calm and repeatedly asking that she be turned off. An exasperated Murray tells Sandra that Nick's mother's breasts did not light up, turns Bubbles off, and says that Nick has a perfectly healthy and normal awareness of what's real and what's not. Nick cracks a joke about selling the doll to Albert, Sandra laughs, Albert grows angry, Sandra becomes angry at his being angry, and Murray suggests they all go visit the Statue of Liberty. Albert insists that he stick to the subject, but Murray persists, saying that the obvious relationship that

exists between Sandra and Albert would go much more smoothly if he took her out somewhere once in a while. Albert seems to be about to lose his temper, leading Nick to say he needs to get the "educational books" he accidentally left on the street. He exits, but nobody notices.

Act 1, Part 2 Analysis

The introduction of Sandra and Albert establishes a situation that affects Murray on several levels. First, it illustrates the way that Murray deflects difficulty and confrontation with jokes, a habit that seems to have rubbed off on Nick. Second, it defines the first real challenge to Murray's approach with reality by showing that unless he starts taking the situation more seriously, his relationship with Nick could be affected. This aspect of the scene is developed further in the next section of the play.

Third, and perhaps most important, this scene establishes Sandra as someone who, like Murray, hides behind a kind of mask. In her case, it's a mask of professionalism, apparently put in place and kept there at Albert's insistence. We understand this from what we briefly see of the way Albert treats her in this scene and the way he speaks to her in the scene that follows. We also understand, from the way Nick and Murray both charm her and bring out her sense of humor, that Sandra's mask isn't very secure. This means that as her mask slips, there is foreshadowing of later developments in her relationship with Albert, which deteriorates quite quickly, and with Murray, which becomes emotionally intimate at the end of this act and physically intimate later in the play. Through the course of the play, Sandra undergoes a journey of transformation of her own, a journey that both parallels and foreshadows Murray's.

Other elements of foreshadowing in this section include the brief appearance of Arnold, which foreshadows his later appearances and the important role he plays in the plot in the second act and the references to Chuckles the Chipmunk. This actually functions on three levels, reinforcing the idea that the job was important to Murray, hinting at the unpleasant circumstances of his leaving, and foreshadowing the offer to return to the show he receives later in the play.

BOOKRAGS

Act 1, Part 3

Act 1, Part 3 Summary

Albert takes Sandra aside for a private conversation, calls her dear, and in a manner that seems warmer than the way he spoke to her before, talks about how they've lost control of the situation, how she's too inexperienced to be on a job like this, and how she gets too involved in her work. Sandra responds by saying that being as clinical as he is isn't the right way to handle Murray, who then interrupts and makes pointed comments about how she and Albert relate. Albert interrupts with a pointed comment of his own about how Nick may not be allowed to stay and suggests Murray try to help them create a favorable report, which would, in turn, allow Nick to stay. He says such a report is necessary because Nick has never been formally adopted. Murray explains that Nick is his nephew and is there for a visit, but under questioning reveals he's been "visiting" for 7 years. This leads Albert to say that Child Welfare clearly has a right to investigate the situation, but Murray angrily tells him that they have no rights at all and asking whether a university degree qualifies Albert to judge him.

Albert and Sandra prepare to leave, but Murray apologizes and asks what they want to know. Albert asks about Nick's parents. Murray tells a long, detailed story about how his sister abandoned Nick with him 6 years before, came back at one point to collect a suitcase she had also abandoned, and brought with her a man whom Murray says she was destined to marry and divorce in the same way as she'd married and divorced all the men in her life. He says she left after a brief argument and hasn't been seen since. He goes on to reveal that Nick's name isn't really Nick and that they made a deal when he was younger that he could try out any name he wanted until he was 13, at which time he had to settle on one. He lists several of the somewhat strange names Nick has tried, adding that "Nick" might be the one that sticks. Albert finally notices that Nick is gone. Sandra comments that he had earlier wanted him to be gone. Albert speaks sharply to her, she speaks sharply back, and Albert gets up to leave, saying they have to visit the Ledbetter family and that the conversation with Murray is getting nowhere. He and Sandra argue over whether it's really a good time to leave, with Sandra saying she's going to stay and pursue Nick's case. Albert takes her aside for another conference, saying there's nothing more they can do. Sandra argues that there is, saying they should tell Murray how he can make a good impression on Child Welfare so he can keep Nick. Albert says again that Sandra's too inexperienced, leading Sandra to shout at him and then begin to cry. Albert exits, saying Sandra is "off the case" and that anything she says is to be considered unofficial.

Sandra struggles to control herself and apologizes to Murray for exposing him to such unprofessional conduct, but then she resumes crying, saying Albert's probably right and she isn't suited for her job. She talks about how much her parents spent on her education, commenting that she hates the Ledbetter family. When Murray suggests she can't like everyone with whom she works, she says she not only likes most of them, but worries about them. She then talks about Albert, saying that at one point she practiced

writing out her married name using his last name, but she has also fallen asleep several times while he's talking. She continues to cry, Murray tries to cheer her up, she cries louder, and finally, Murray takes out Bubbles and turns her on. This makes Sandra giggle and slowly gain control over her tears. Murray tells her Albert isn't right for her, saying that she's a lover of people and she should celebrate her ability to care for them. She confesses that there's a kind of relief in being away from her job, but she adds that she doesn't really know who she is as a result. He tells her she's got a great opportunity now to find out, invites her to join him on a visit to the Empire State Building or the Zoo, makes a joke about their getting married, and then when Sandra calls him "Mr. Burns" insists that she call him "Murray." She says that it's time to return to reality for a moment, and Murray comments that he only wants to visit. Sandra tells him in no uncertain terms that Child Welfare really could take Nick away, and they have to find a way to strengthen his case for keeping him.

Nick enters with an armful of "educational books" he just bought, but Murray tells him Sandra isn't on the case any more. This leads Nick to assume that Murray got angry and insulting, but Murray reassures him everything is going to be all right. Nick tells Sandra he really is supported by his home environment, and Sandra says she believes him but says there's nothing she can officially do to help. Nick comments that they're now in real trouble, but Murray changes the subject, getting out a pair of ukuleles and convincing a reluctant Nick to join him in playing, singing, and dancing for Sandra. As they perform, Nick becomes more and more enthusiastic, and then slowly comes to realize that Murray is directing all his attention to Sandra. As Murray continues to perform, Nick puts down the ukulele and collects his backpack and pajamas, saying as he exits through the window that he figures he'll be staying with the upstairs neighbor again tonight.

Act 1, Part 3 Analysis

The essential action of this section is summed up in Murray's remark to Sandra that he wants to just "visit" reality. From Albert and Sandra's arrival, right to the close of the act, Murray's response to the reality confronting him is to make jokes and sarcastic comments, change the subject as often as he can, provide distractions, and ultimately sing and dance. Perhaps his most interesting avoidance mechanism is turning accusations back at the accuser, a trick he uses on Albert when he asks whether Albert's credentials give him any right to judge him. It's only when this trick doesn't work that Murray begins one of his brief, so-called "visits to reality" as he tells the story of Nick's mother, but even then he avoids a full dose of reality, disguising the obvious pain associated with what he's speaking about with witticisms. His visit to reality continues as he actually confronts Sandra's feelings, making deliberate efforts to help her re-shape her thinking about what's just happened to her, but then he ends his visit by distracting the obviously worried Nick and Sandra with the ukulele performance. All this illustrates how Murray is capable of dealing with reality, but only in limited ways and for a limited time, essentially taking two steps forward and one step back on his journey of transformation toward a fuller, more honest life.

On the other hand, Sandra's parallel journey advances much further than Murray's as she defiantly stands up to her fiancy, finds herself without a job, and resolves to face the challenges of her situation head on. Her moving forward provides a clear and defining contrast to Murray's lack of movement, illustrating how he essentially remains stuck in his clownish avoidance of real life. The irony, of course, is that she moves forward as a result of Murray's actions, which include the way that he calls her "Sandy,' instead of the more formal "Sandra."

In the middle of all of this is Nick, who throughout the act has demonstrated that in spite of his slightly eccentric way of expressing himself, he is nevertheless the wisest character in the play with the healthiest perspective and truest sense of who he is. He is the still, shrewd, perceptive eye of the emotionally volatile hurricane whirling around him, providing a steady contrast that helps shape our perspectives of, and reactions to, the other characters. At the same time, it's possible to see how he, too, is wearing a mask, specifically, the various names he's apparently trying out, which represent an avoidance of reality similar to Murray's wisecracking. At the end of the play, therefore, when Nick lets go of the masks provided by the various other names and decides on just one, it's a trigger for Murray to let go of his own mask, at least to a point, and face reality.

Act 2, Part 1

Act 2, Part 1 Summary

The following morning, Murray's apartment is the same as when we left it except for a screen surrounding the bed. The phone rings, and Murray enters from the bathroom, shouts a joke into it, and hangs up. He opens the blinds and complains about the non-view, and calls the pre-recorded weather announcement. After he hangs up, the phone immediately rings again. He picks it up, shouts into it again, and again hangs up.

Sandra's head appears briefly over the top of the screen and then disappears again when she sees Murray. In extremely formal and polite language she bids him good morning, asks how he is, and asks for a bathrobe. Murray responds in the same kind of language, finds her a bathrobe, and explains that he didn't wake her when he got up because she was smiling and he liked looking at her. Sandra rushes into the kitchen, thinking it's the bathroom. Murray hands Sandra her clothes, a toothbrush, and toothpaste. They continue to talk politely as Arnold enters with his usual bag of fruit. He asks whether the two people who were there when he visited the previous day were from Child Welfare, and then he warns Murray that those people "don't kid around." Murray tells him everything's fine and sends him on his way. He then offers Sandra some of yesterday's coffee, but Sandra says she's already started heating it and has found the cups. She warns him she's coming out, he says that's good, and she comes out fully dressed with two cups of coffee. They sit, chat politely some more, and then after a few sips Sandra gets up to leave. Murray gives Sandra her files, and they say polite goodbyes. Sandra exits, closing the door behind her.

After a moment, Murray runs to the door and opens it again, pulling Sandra back in since she hadn't let go of the doorknob. They kiss and talk about now neither of them knew what was going on, and confess that they think they love each other. Sandra speaks about how happy she feels not going into work, how she's no longer going to let other people run her life, and about her plans for redecorating. She says she's going to start by buying some new curtains and prepares to leave. Before she can go, however, there's a knock on the door. Sandra tells Murray to open the door, saying she's got nothing to hide.

Murray opens the door and greets Albert. Sandra immediately ducks into the closet and closes the door. As Murray shows him in, Albert mentions that he called twice that morning and was hung up on, and that both he and Sandra's parents are quite upset that she didn't show up to the meeting with the Ledbetters. Murray says Sandra's in the closet, and Albert thinks he's joking. Murray insists he's telling the truth, and Albert looks in the closet. He sees Sandra, realizes Murray really was telling the truth, and wonders what she's doing in there. Murray makes a joke, and Albert tells him that he's there in his official capacity. Murray makes another joke and offers him coffee. Albert refuses, but Murray tops off his own cup and Sandra's, passing it in to her.

Murray asks Albert what's on his mind, and Albert explains that Murray's lack of cooperation has led the Child Welfare Board to remove Nick from his care. Murray struggles to stay calm as Albert explains that in 2 days he'll have a chance to appear before the Board to demonstrate how the situation has changed. Murray talks about how formally and carefully Albert speaks, and Albert says he realizes he lacks warmth, but that doesn't mean he doesn't care about the children for whom he's responsible. He goes on to explain that he recognizes and admires Murray for his warmth and for his ability to inspire affection from Nick, adding that he doesn't possess that ability. He also says that his admiration doesn't change his belief that Murray is creating a potentially damaging environment and fostering in Nick a "distorted picture of this world." Murray makes a joke about how he is the one who should be sent to a foster home, not Nick. Albert says that Murray doesn't really have the capacity to listen and that his picture of the world is indeed dangerous. He says goodbye and exits.

Murray tells Sandra that she can come out of hiding now. She enters from the closet, apologizing and saying she didn't know what to do. Murray then begins a long speech, speaking quietly at first but becoming more passionate as he talks about how important Nick is to him, how important it is to Nick that he stay, and how special he is. As he continues, he repeatedly asks Sandra whether she's listening to him, becoming increasingly eloquent as he lists the things he wants Nick to be and know and understand, concluding with his hope that Nick will someday know why he's a human being and not a chair. He talks about how good Nick's sense of humor is, all the different ways and places in which he finds humor, and just how much he likes having Nick around.

Murray and Sandra talk about Murray's options for making a good impression at the board hearing, including buying a good suit, wearing a good tie, and landing a job. As Sandra hunts for a tie, Murray calls Arnold, leaving a message with his secretary to tell him that he wants a job. Sandra shows him a tie, he makes a joke, Sandra laughs, he tells her to keep laughing, and then he tells the secretary he'll be down later in the afternoon. After he hangs up, Sandra asks whether she can go with him, but he says he needs to do this on his own. He makes another couple of jokes, kisses her, tells her to wish him luck, and exits.

Act 2, Part 1 Analysis

Murray's journey of transformation continues in this scene as he's confronted with reality in two different ways. He seems to accept the first, his suddenly emerging feelings for Sandra, much more easily than the second, Albert's announcement that the situation with Nick has gotten more serious. The different reactions can be explained fairly simply; being around Sandra makes him happy, while the news from Albert makes him unhappy. We can, therefore, understand from this section of the play that Murray particularly avoids unpleasant thoughts, feelings, and situations. .

Once again, Sandra provides an interesting contrast and parallel, embracing the challenges her new life provides and preparing to move on in a way that Murray seems

unable or unwilling to do. This is probably because, once again, she views the uncertain future with which she's been confronted as being full of hope and positive prospects. Even if that's not the case, however, the point is that even in the face of a negative such as joblessness, she's confronting the situation head on. This is a direct contrast to Murray, who not only avoids negative situations, but also has difficulty in acknowledging the role his attitudes and behavior played in creating the situation in the first place.

In Albert's speech about his views on his work and on himself, we have another defining contrast to Murray. Albert, like Nick (but unlike Murray), appears to have a realistic perspective about who he is, what he does, and what situation he's in. He faces both the facts and his discomfort with the facts honestly, and his comments create a very human dimension to a character who, up until now, had appeared to be little more than a stuffed shirt. This situation foreshadows one of the play's most important moments in which Murray reveals a similarly hidden, but still very human, side of his character in the long speech at the end of this scene about why it's important for Nick to stay.

The first key elements in this speech are the passion and enthusiasm Murray exhibits and the near-desperation with which he expresses his desire for Nick to stay. This is a very moving glimpse of the inner feelings that we suspect he uses his joking, clown-like exterior to hide. A second important element is his repeated demand that Sandra look as though she's listening to him, which suggests that a key aspect to Murray's character is a feeling that no one is paying attention to him. This is particularly important when related to his comments earlier in the play about how he started talking to people in the language of Chuckles the Chipmunk.

As a result of all of this, it becomes possible to understand that at the core of who Murray is, is a need for his true voice to be heard, for him to be seen and appreciated and understood for who he is. This idea is reinforced by the way he talks about Nick's being the best audience he ever had. His fear, of course, is that he won't be seen or heard or appreciated by anyone, which is why he wears the clown mask and uses humor as a defense mechanism. The play makes this point outright, but it's possible to infer it from the subtext or the unspoken thoughts, feelings, and motivations behind what is said. All of this means that Murray's journey of transformation can now be more specifically defined as taking him from a place of insecurity and concealment to a place of confidence and openness. By the time Murray begins his job search, it becomes possible to believe that he's finally taking real steps toward becoming a human being without joking so much. The action of the following section, however, indicates that he's not taking the kind of steps we, and he, thought he was.

Act 2, Part 2

Act 2, Part 2 Summary

This scene takes place in Arnold's office, busy and messy with a speaker phone on the desk. As the scene begins, the voice of Chuckles the Chipmunk is heard, speaking the introduction to his show in childlike language. After he finishes, the way he speaks changes and he starts talking like Leo, the actor who portrays Chuckles. As Arnold enters and listens, Leo's voice comes over the speaker-phone, talking about how great a writer Murray was, how he feels like a phony with his voice coming over the speaker phone, and asking whether Murray will be coming back. Arnold says he doesn't know, adding that he sent Murray over to another job interview. Arnold's secretary speaks through the intercom announcing that Murray has arrived. Arnold says goodbye to Leo, who hangs up, just as Murray enters, dressed in a new suit. As Arnold repeatedly asks him how the other meeting went, Murray repeatedly avoids the question by talking about the state of Arnold's office and making jokes about seeing King Kong climb a skyscraper. Finally, he explains he got taken out for an expensive lunch, asked to be a panelist on a quiz show, and left after refusing the offer, saying the producer who made the offer is an idiot. Arnold reminds him how desperately he needs a job, but Murray says he isn't worried because Leo/Chuckles wants him back. Arnold reminds him of the way Murray let him know he was leaving, abandoning him in the middle of a conversation in his apartment. He then says they can call Leo and talk, but he tells Murray to make no jokes and take the situation very seriously. As Arnold is placing the call, Murray says that working for Chuckles will be okay for a while. Arnold tells him firmly that he has to stick with it for longer than a while, adding that Child Welfare told him Murray's got a year to prove that he's stable enough to be Nick's guardian, and then his case will be reviewed.

Leo and Murray greet each other, and Leo immediately says he needs Murray back, calling him "Sweetie" and then saying again he's a big phony with no real talent. Murray makes a joke about how that's true, but Leo tells him there can be no more jokes, saying that the way Murray behaved before hurt and upset him professionally and personally. He then talks about how important it is to him that the children be respected, meaning that Murray can no longer write joke answers to their questions. Murray agrees, and Leo describes him as the best, going on to tell him an idea for a new segment of the show. Murray makes a joke, Leo talks about how mocking he is, and starts in on a story that Murray has clearly and unhappily heard several times before. As Leo talks with great feeling about how Chuckles is very real to him, how much he loves connecting with kids, and how grateful he is that he can get paid for something he loves so much, Murray puts the speaker in the garbage can. Leo talks about hearing strange crumpling and rattling noises. Arnold pulls the speaker out of the garbage, but Leo has hung up.

As Murray makes jokes about what just happened, Arnold angrily tells him he's got to face reality. Just as angrily, Murray talks about the reality Arnold lives in, with old

pictures of his family and getting information about the world over the phone. Arnold, very cool, tries to get him to calm down, but Murray shouts that he wants Arnold to get angry, or respond in some way to what he's saying. Arnold tries to assure him everything's going to be fine, but Murray exits. Arnold says softly that there's no way King Kong is out there as if Murray were still in the room.

Act 2, Part 2 Analysis

This scene illustrates how much further Murray still has to go on his journey of transformation. Again, he's confronted with a reality he doesn't want to face, again, he makes jokes, and again, he makes things tougher on himself as a result. The difference between this scene and his similar confrontation with Albert is that in this case the person he's confronting calls him on what he's doing. Arnold's insistence that Murray face what he's doing is the first time that someone has spoken forcefully and directly to him about what's going on. Sandra did it in Part 3 of Act 1, but she was much less insistent than Arnold is here. Meanwhile, the references to King Kong are symbolic of Murray's situation, with his joke about seeing King Kong outside representing the way he lives in a world of fantasy, and Arnold's final line referring to his hope that Murray can leave that world behind.

What's particularly interesting about this scene is Murray's response to Arnold's lack of anger, his insistence that Arnold, in effect, fight back. The implication is that in Murray's mind, the life that Arnold leads, with its lack of intense feeling and up-to-date family photographs, is what's unreal, and that for Murray reality is defined by genuine and intense feeling. In other words, Murray thinks that Arnold's life is a phony, a way of being and living and feeling that he rejects. This idea is reinforced by Murray's agreement with Leo/Chuckles that he's a phony with little talent, and by his positive reactions to Sandra and Nick, both of whom freely express genuine emotion. It's also reinforced by the surprising parallel between Albert from Child Welfare and Leo, both of whom confess to loving children but who both express those feelings behind masks: Albert behind a mask of propriety and Leo behind the mask of Chuckles. All of this combines to give a clear idea of why the play is called what it is. The world, it seems, is full of clowns, many more than a thousand, people hiding behind masks of the sort that Murray is both railing against and struggling to remove. This struggle dramatizes the thematic statement that leading an emotionally authentic life is the road to freedom, harmony, and happiness.

Act 2, Part 3

Act 2, Part 3 Summary

This scene is set in Murray's apartment, which has been somewhat redecorated. Nick enters from the fire escape and smiles appreciatively at the changes. Sandra enters from the kitchen, and their conversation reveals that Nick went to the upstairs neighbor's after school, that Sandra did the redecorating, and that they're both excited about Murray's going down to Arnold's office to talk about a job. Nick talks about how Murray acts strangely sometimes but that it's fun, and then he says that Sandra's a nice lady. She says he's nice as well, they talk about how they both like to laugh, and then Nick asks whether she's going to stay for a while. Sandra says she thinks she might. As Nick gets ready to go, he asks whether Murray's seen the redecorating yet. When Sandra says no, Nick wishes her luck and exits through the window.

Murray enters and makes jokes about the decorating. Sandra asks how the job search went, and Murray begins a long story about how he started saying "I'm sorry" randomly to people and how some people ignored him but how many reacted forgivingly. He talks about realizing that all people have had something happen to them for which they feel they deserve an apology, saying apologies are the most welcome form of communication. Sandra understands him to mean that he didn't take any of the jobs offered to him. He apologizes for not living up to his promise, joking about how beautiful his apology was. Finally, he explains that he couldn't live the way taking responsibility for Nick would make him live, being constantly monitored, judged, and reported on. Sandra quietly talks about how she's had no effect on him at all and how she failed all her tests in leadership at school. Murray talks about some beautiful ships he saw at the pier and how watching them sail away gives him a real feeling of things beginning. Sandra replies that Nick will have to leave, and that she has to have sense enough to leave, too. She adds that she understands why Nick likes it here and that she would too, if she were 12. She goes on to say Murray is either wonderfully independent or extraordinarily selfish, and that she can't make up her mind which it is.

As Sandra prepares to leave, Murray angrily asks what she's going to do now, and whether she's going to go back to hiding in the closet. Sandra suggests that he lives in a much bigger closet than she does and exits. He shouts that she's forgotten her files, he hates the redecorating, and what's happened to his home. He rips off the jacket of his new suit and throws it across the room, and then tries to make a joke to himself but can't think of anything to say.

Act 2, Part 3 Analysis

Once again, Murray is confronted head-on by someone who wants him to face reality, once again he denies it and makes jokes, and once again he ends off worse than he started. This time, it's Sandra who challenges him, speaks quite plainly and powerfully

in the same way that Arnold did, summarizing both her and our reactions to Murray's behavior: is he selfish or independent? He's both, and the point has to be made that a person can be independent without being selfish. The bottom line, however, is that Murray's speech about why he doesn't want the responsibility of caring for Nick suggests that he's veered from independence into selfishness. His reaction to Sandra's comments is just as plain as the comments themselves when he throws the jacket and shouts about what happened to his home, visually and dynamically expressing his rejection of the life that people around him are trying to make him live. He's reacting not just to Sandra but to Arnold, Nick, Albert, Leo, and everyone he thinks is trying to make him live a responsible life, a life that he rejects as phony. This suggests that the final moments of this act are Murray's lowest point, or his time of greatest crisis, the point at which he comes face to face with the fear that the movies, the jokes, the morning routine and all the women have helped him avoid.

The idea that Murray is at this moment in crisis is reinforced by the fact that after his explosion of temper, this man, who has always had something to say, finds that his words have abandoned him. In this moment he confronts the fact that his "real" life is actually more phony than anyone's, and as such is the most vulnerable phase of his journey of transformation. Act 3 dramatizes how he lifts himself up and completes that journey.

Act 3, Part 1

Act 3, Part 1 Summary

An old recording of "The Stars and Stripes Forever" plays loudly as Murray puts his apartment back the way it was. Arnold enters, and for a moment, he and Murray neither speak nor look at each other. Arnold repeatedly asks Murray to turn the music off, and when he doesn't, turns it off himself. He talks about how he feels insulted by how Murray behaved, and says he apologized to Leo on his behalf and that Leo is coming over to meet with him. He then says that if Murray wants to keep Nick, he has to do whatever it takes, but Murray says he's worked out a way to tell Nick that he's leaving, and that Nick will understand. He and Arnold argue about who's living the most mature life, and Murray launches into a long speech about how he feels that telling jokes is the only way to be unique and bring something special to life. He talks about being on the subway one day and forgetting what day it was, saying that that scared him deeply. He feels that everyone should know what every day is and live each one fully. He adds that he has yet to go out and congratulate Irving Feldman because yesterday was his special day. He starts to leave, but Arnold shouts loudly and makes him stop. Murray looks at him in amazement, Arnold jokes that he scared himself, and then he talks seriously about how Murray wants to be a hero and change the world but that he (Arnold) has decided to deal with the world as it is. He admits he's not exceptional, but says his life is peaceful while he sees Murray's as tortured. He says he feels bad because he cares but adds that he will not accept being defined as one of "the bad guys," saying he's the best possible Arnold Burns he can be. He exits, telling Murray to give his regards to Irving Feldman and turning the record player back on. Murray becomes very still, just listening to the music for a long moment.

Nick enters, notices that Sandra's redecorating has itself been redecorated, and asks where Sandra is. Murray turns the music off, and says she's not around. Nick then announces that because Murray has gotten a job, he's decided to change his life as well and has decided on a name. Murray tries to tell him the truth about what happened that day, but Nick continues with his story, saying that after due consideration he's decided to take Murray's name and showing him the new library card he had made as proof. Murray says he's flattered, but then he talks about how confusing it will be and suggests several other names that Nick could call himself. Nick insists that his name is now Murray.

Leo shouts for Murray from outside the door. When he hears his voice, Nick exits to put on a tie, and Murray goes to the door.

Act 3, Part 1 Analysis

Murray's redecoration makes a similar visual statement to that made at the end of Act 2 when he threw off his coat, representing his rejection of the people trying to change his

life and his determination to live exactly the way he wants. This defiance is reiterated in his comment to Arnold about how he's thought of a way to tell Nick the truth about what's going to happen in a couple of days and his continued dismissal of what Arnold is trying to get him to do. His story about forgetting what day it was is undeniably powerful and moving, but ultimately defines him as being afraid, a reiteration of the point made at the beginning of the play by his story about going to the movies. Arnold's speech in response is equally powerful and equally moving, suggesting that in some ways he's a bigger hero than what he accuses Murray of being, facing life and living it honestly in the best way he can. This contrast reinforces the previously discussed idea that Murray's life is, in fact, the phoniest in the play. Even though Arnold's life may not be showy or exciting, his speech makes it clear that it's fully and authentically and honestly lived.

It's interesting to note that their confrontation begins and ends with the playing of one of the most patriotic of American songs, a detail suggesting that the personal conflict between Murray and Arthur has some connection to American culture and belief systems. In essence, the underlying philosophy of American society is belief in the individual and in the principle of freedom. Throughout history, independent spirits like Murray have been held up as positive examples of that philosophy. Trailblazers are admired, independent thinkers are respected, and strong personalities idolized. All this suggests that the playing of "The Stars and Stripes Forever" is an ironic comment on that independence, suggesting that as valued as it is, when taken to extremes it becomes hollow, a mask for more humanistic values. Juxtaposed with Arnold's quiet heroism, it's even possible that the music is making the thematic point that while American society is full of such mask-wearing clowns, the lives lived and led by people like Arnold are what truly makes the country great.

It's also interesting to note that Murray turns off the record player at the beginning of his scene with Nick in which Murray is once more confronted with reality and once more forced into taking things seriously. This time, however, possibly because Arnold's points have finally hit home, Murray realizes that by symbolically taking on his identity, Nick stands to lose what he stated earlier was his greatest gift, his sense of identity. Juxtaposed with the turning off of the music, which represents the reverence in which irreverence like Murray's is held, the conversation with Nick suggests that the time has finally come for Murray to remove his individualistic mask, face the consequences of his actions, and deal with reality. This revelation marks a key turning point in Murray's journey of transformation, his passage back up from the low point where he was at the end of Act 2.

Act 3, Part 2

Act 3, Part 2 Summary

Leo enters and greets Murray. Nick enters from the bathroom wearing his tie. Leo gives him a cardboard statue of Chuckles the Chipmunk and gives him two bags of potato chips from the show's sponsor. He then asks Nick to leave, saying that he needs to talk privately to Murray. After Nick exits, Leo comments that he pushed too hard, but that Nick is a good kid. Murray asks how Leo's kids are, and Leo says they're fine but adds that even they don't like his show any more. He forgets the name of his youngest child, and after Murray reminds him what it is, says that with Murray back on staff the show will be great again. Murray apologizes for hanging up on him that afternoon, and Leo explains that he understands, that he knows he makes people nervous. He adds that sometimes he thinks he's disappeared from his own life. Murray comments that he's sure Leo is still there, and Leo hears that comment as a little nasty, but then he says that he likes it, calling Murray real and talking about how he's surrounded by phonies.

As he's talking, Sandra enters. Murray notices her, and she says quite formally that she left her files there that morning. She then realizes that Leo must be Mr. Herman, and Leo says that he'd rather not be, but that's who he is. Sandra exits, again leaving the files behind. Murray picks them up from the bureau and waits at the door as Leo comments on how attractive she is and asks what she does. When Murray says she's his decorator, Leo comments on how nice the place is and wonders why he never visited before. Murray reminds him he has, on the day Murray quit. Leo remembers how unhappy he was at being abandoned in that way and comments that his apartment is a kind of shelter against the idiots out there in the world. He shouts about being free and says that in a year or so he and Murray should start a new show. Murray reminds him he said the same thing several years ago, and Leo refers to himself as a coward. He then catches a glimpse of the cardboard Chuckles statue and suddenly becomes embarrassed.

When Nick comes in with a bowl of the potato chips, Leo goes into one of Chuckles' routines. Nick doesn't laugh, so Leo asks for reassurances that what he did was funny. Leo tries another routine, but Nick doesn't find that funny either, and Leo tries to prove that it is funny by showing him a notebook that lists all his routines and the reactions they got. Murray makes a joke, and Leo starts to get angry, but Nick saves the situation by showing Leo some of the routines he and Murray do. Leo doesn't laugh, and when Nick accuses him of missing the funny part, he becomes extremely angry, saying he doesn't work well with odd kids like Nick and that Murray is a bad influence. Nick demands that he take back what he said. Leo says that all he wants is his simple child's opinion of his routine. Nick talks calmly and quietly about how Leo simply isn't funny, how sad and dull he is, and how bad the potato chips are.

Murray laughs suddenly and loudly. Leo becomes furious, saying that the only reason Murray invited him there is to make a fool out of him. As he shouts, Nick grabs his

ukulele and starts singing a song that Murray sang on the day he quit his job with Leo. Leo starts to go, and Murray tells him to wait. Nick says he wants Leo to go away, Murray tells him to be calm, and Nick kicks the cardboard statue to bits. Murray then grabs him, Nick struggles and shouts that they don't want jerks like Leo around, and Murray says they can't get rid of him and he's sorry. As Nick calms down, Murray tells him to go to his room. Nick makes a joke about not having a room, and Murray tells him to go lie down. As he does, Murray and Leo apologize to each other, and Leo asks whether the routines he did were funny. Murray says they were, and they agree that Murray will come to work at the studio in the morning. Leo exits, and Murray goes to Nick.

Sandra enters at the doorway and watches as Nick complains about how Leo talked to them. He says he's going to change his name to Theodore and asks why Murray stopped him from getting rid of Leo. Sandra comes in, making a joke about how they're treating some of the things she bought, starts cleaning a stain out of a tablecloth, and comments that it's psychologically very interesting that she left her files behind. Murray and Sandra greet each other politely, but then Sandra tells him he's standing in the light she needs to see by. Murray moves away as Sandy and Nick talk about how Nick can help clean up. As they put things away, Murray tries to stop them, but neither of them seems to listen.

Murray looks out the window, complains about the non-view and shouts down to the neighbors. Meanwhile, Sandra calls the pre-recorded weather announcement, and says it's going to be a beautiful day. Murray makes a joke about how it's a beautiful day for a parade, Nick puts "The Stars and Stripes Forever" back on, and Murray talks as though he's organizing a parade. Sandra and Nick continue to work as Murray repeatedly shouts, "Let's go!"

Act 3, Part 2 Analysis

In this extended scene, the action of the play reaches its climax as Murray is confronted by several aspects of reality and makes choices that clearly define the path his life is going to take from now on. The climax begins with the arrival of Leo, who represents the empty kind of life that Murray has been struggling so desperately to avoid. This is indicated by the fact that in spite of his good intentions, Leo's routines aren't reaching his audience, by the fact that he can't remember his child's name, and also by his mumbling admission after Sandra leaves that he "might as well be" Mr. Herman. Perhaps most tellingly, the parallels between Murray and Leo are further defined by the way that Leo goes for laughs in the same way Murray does, defining himself by his efforts to be funny. All of this combines to make Murray think he might benefit from taking a good look at himself, a look he begins to take at the end of the play.

His second confrontation with reality comes from Nick, who acts in the way he thinks Murray would act in getting rid of the phony Leo. The reality here is that it's not just Murray's name that Nick has adopted, it's also his intolerance and lack of compassion. The point here is that while we understand this is what he's done, it's the first time that

Murray has seen a reflection of that aspect of himself. It's definitely a shock, partly because he's never seen it before and partly because it means that Leo was actually right when he said that Murray was and is a bad influence.

Murray's most important confrontation with reality occurs in the moment when he's faced with the choice of getting rid of Leo or trying to patch things up. By choosing the latter, he's saying that creating a life with Nick is more important than his independence, which indicates that he's finally facing his fears and dealing with them in the same way that Albert does. If he had chosen to get rid of Leo, it would have meant that he was once again avoiding responsibility, giving in to fear, and continuing to live behind his carefree mask. As it stands, he's taken off the mask but hasn't quite discarded completely.

To continue the metaphor, Murray is still holding the mask when Sandra comes back and indicates that she's come to stay this time, maybe not forever, but at least for a while. Murray comes close to putting it back on when he tries to get Sandra and Nick to stop redecorating, but he finally throws it away completely as he stops protesting, starts talking about the parade, and finishes the play by shouting let's go. He's clearly prepared to give a new life a try, the conclusion of his journey of transformation that's also represented by the way his usual morning routine is repeated in the same way as a new day has always begun; a new life is beginning. He's realized that contrary to what Leo said about his apartment's being a place of freedom, it's actually been a hiding place where he could indulge his fears. The fact that it's being redecorated by two of the honest, open people who helped bring about his internal transformation represents that transformation and once again makes the thematic point that true heroism and independence comes from facing reality rather than wearing a mask and hiding from it. This point is reinforced by the non-ironic playing of "The Stars and Stripes Forever," a symbol that suggests how independence and personal responsibility, for a culture and for an individual, are far from being mutually exclusive.

Finally, a word about the symbolic value of the two statues, Bubbles and Chuckles. As politically incorrect as she is, Bubbles is a symbol of reality in that she represents Murray and Nick's essentially healthy, if somewhat unusual, relationship. On the other hand, Chuckles is a clear symbol of the emptiness of Leo's life. Nick's destruction of Chuckles represents the way that both he and Murray are determined to never live the life that Leo does, cementing once and for all their mutual disrespect for emptiness, and their united front in the face of fantasy, chatty chipmunks, and nobody laughing.

Characters

Albert Amundson

Albert Amundson is a social case worker with the New York Bureau of Child Welfare, sent to investigate Murray's fitness as a guardian for Nick. Albert is a stuffy, no-nonsense man. He takes his job seriously and wants to do it well, but he has no affinity for children and makes no attempt to talk with Nick when he visits the apartment with his partner, Sandra Markowitz. In fact, he suggests repeatedly that Murray send Nick away while they discuss the "case." He is not impressed by Nick's ability to identify where Albert has lived by listening to his accent nor amused by Nick's impressions or his song-and-dance number. He scolds Sandra□who is also his fiancé□because she allows herself to become emotionally involved in cases. Albert intends to stay detached and scientific as he explores other people's lives. His conclusion, after meeting Nick and Murray, is that Nick must be moved to foster care for his own protection; he does not see any value in the way Murray is bringing him up. He quarrels with Sandra over this conclusion, but uses his seniority with the bureau to remove Sandra from the case.

In act 2, Albert returns to announce the board's findings: Nick will be removed in three days unless Murray can prove that he is reliable. Albert comes personally to deliver the news and explains that while he admires Murray's affection for Nick, he believes that Nick is not receiving the kind of emotional support he needs. He knows that Murray is incapable of understanding this decision, but he is confident in it, and he accepts his role in the drama: "Your villains and heroes are all so terribly clear to you, and I am obviously one of the villains."

Arnold Burns

Arnold Burns is Murray's brother and also his agent. He is the most successful and stable member of the family, working for a large company of theatrical agents in downtown Manhattan and living a normal home life with a wife and children. Arnold looks after Nick and Murray, bringing them a bag of fresh fruit every day and arranging job interviews for Murray. Twenty years earlier, Arnold shared Murray's sense of humor, and he lost his job as a salesman for Harry the Fur King because he did not behave maturely enough. Now he has a large office with a spectacular view on the twenty-second floor. In Murray's eyes, Arnold has given up his personality and free spirit in pursuit of money and conformity. But Arnold feels at peace with his compromises. He refuses to apologize for the way he lives and tells Murray proudly "I am the best possible Arnold Burns."

Murray Burns

Murray Burns, the protagonist of the play, is an unemployed television writer and the uncle and unofficial guardian of Nick. He had a successful job as head writer for the

Chuckles the Chipmunk show until five months before the play begins, but he quit suddenly without notice, as he had quit several other writing jobs before that. Murray is a free spirit, an independent thinker, and he cannot be tied down to a nine-to-five job, wearing a suit and answering to a boss. Instead, he has spent the last five months going to the movies, visiting the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty, and practicing his ukulele. Murray is the sort of person who notices and takes great pleasure in simple things: the smell inside a movie house, good pastrami, his collection of hats and broken radios, and watching ocean liners set sail. He enjoys every minute of his life, as perhaps only a person with no responsibilities can.

As a substitute parent for Nick, Murray has strengths and weaknesses. Nick seems to have no doubt about Murray's love for him, and he has grown into an intelligent and independent boy. But Nick knows Murray is not reliable about practical things, and like an adult he does worry when the rent is not paid for months or when Murray risks having Nick put in foster care by refusing to look for a job or say the right things to the social workers. The problem with Murray is that he cannot keep his mouth shut. When Albert and Sandra, case workers from the New York Bureau of Child Welfare, come to investigate, Murray acts silly and insults Albert. When Arnold tries to help Murray find a job, Murray insults him and his family. When Leo tries to patch things up, Murray insults him, too. What Murray does not insult he ignores, including eleven months' worth of calls and letters from the bureau and the job offer from Sloan, another television host. There is no real meanness in Murray. Somehow, as irresponsible as he is, he is charming, and Sandra falls in love with him in less than twenty-four hours.

As the play progresses, Murray tries to maneuver a course between being carefree and being responsible. For him, there is no middle ground, no compromise, so every attempt to become just a little more conventional ends in failure when he abruptly changes course. In the end, Murray seems to accept having a regular job, a neat apartment and a steady relationship with a woman as the price he must pay to keep Nick in his life. The audience has to wonder, however, how long this apparent stability will last.

Nick Burns

Nicks Burns is Murray and Arnold's twelve-year-old nephew, the son of their sister Elaine and one of her long string of irresponsible men. When Nick was five, Elaine left him at Murray's apartment and took off, returning only once to pick up a suitcase; she showed so little concern for Nick from the beginning that she never even named him. Murray has had an agreement with the boy: he can try out any name he likes for as long as he wants to, and when he is thirteen he will choose a permanent name and have it approved by the courts. Nick is an unusually bright child, and he attends a special school for gifted children. He has blossomed under Murray's eccentric style of parenting. He is independent, caring, sociable, and funny□a likeable kid who charms Sandra right away. In many ways, he is more mature than Murray, and he understands, when Murray refuses to, the danger they will be in if Murray will not behave himself when the social workers come and if he will not get a job.

Nick thinks he can read people and that he is skilled at telling them what they want to hear, but he is probably better at conning other twelve-year-olds than adults. When he tells Sandra that he and Murray "play many wholesome and constructive-type games together," or thanks Leo for the cardboard Chuckles the Chipmunk with "imagine how pleased I am to receive it," they see through him. Nick loves Murray and wants to stay with him, and he tries desperately to convince the other adults to appreciate Murray the way he is. He is attracted to Sandra because he thinks she will be able to help him mold Murray just enough to get by in the real world. To show his affection for Murray, Nick brings home a library card filled out with what he has chosen for his permanent name: Murray Burns. This act so flatters and confuses Murray, who has almost convinced himself that he and Nick would be better off without each other, that Murray accepts Leo's job, assuring that he and Nick can stay together.

Chuckles the Chipmunk

See Leo Herman

Leo Herman

Leo Herman, forty-one, is the star of the *Chuckles the Chipmunk* children's television show on NBC. While he is in character as Chuckles, Leo is wildly cheerful and saccharine, prone to saying things like the play's first sentence: "Goshes and gollygoods, kidderoonies; now what are all us Chippermunkies gonna play first this fine mornin?'" Off camera, he is insecure and depressed. He knows that children do not like him, and he suspects that he is not even funny. He tries too hard; he does not know how to reach people. As he says about himself, he is nothing but "the biggest phony you ever met."

When he visits Murray and Nick at their apartment, he brings Nick a gift of a life-sized cardboard cutout of himself, a Chuckles the Chipmunk hat, and a bag of Chuckles the Chipmunk potato chips. Although Nick accepts the gifts gracefully, Leo eventually realizes that they only demonstrate his own big ego. Until six months before the play opens, Murray was the head writer for the show. Since he quit abruptly, the quality of the show has slipped, and Leo would very much like to get Murray back. But as much as he respects Murray's talents as a writer, he cannot accept Murray's disrespect for Leo and for the show. Meeting Nick and seeing the apartment, Leo realizes the extent of Murray's quirkiness. He accuses Murray of ruining Nick's life and is about to walk out when Murray stops him. Over Nick's objections, Murray soothes Leo's hurt feelings, assures him that he is funny, and agrees to report back to the show in the morning.

Sandra Markowitz

Sandra Markowitz, just a few months out of graduate school, is a psychological social worker with the New York Bureau of Child Welfare. With her partner and intended husband Albert Amundson, she has been sent to investigate Murray's fitness as a

guardian. Unlike Albert, Sandra is charmed by Murray and Nick's humor and intelligence, and she would like to find a way to keep them together in spite of what the regulations say. Sandra is ill-suited to her work for the bureau. Although she has a doctoral degree and Albert does not, her lack of confidence usually leads her to bow to his professional judgment. Worse, she cannot help but become emotionally involved in her cases, taking a dislike to one little boy and finding herself delighted by Nick and Murray. When she refuses to back down and follow Albert's lead in this case, he leaves the apartment angrily while Sandra stays behind, weeping. Murray tells her she is well rid of Albert and of her job□that this is her opportunity to look for real happiness.

As act 2 opens, it is clear that Sandra has continued her impetuous behavior and stayed the night with Murray. She is both happy and insecure about it, and when Albert returns to the apartment she hides in the closet so he will not find her there. Sandra is attracted to Murray's eccentricity, but she is not willing to give up conventional life to the degree he has. Knowing that the bureau really will have Nick removed from his home if Murray does not show some responsibility, she urges him to get a job. While Murray is out, she cleans up the apartment, getting rid of all the broken clocks and hats and buying new bedspreads and pillows. She imagines that she has reformed Murray overnight, that he will be willing to make changes for her sake or for Nick's. Crushed when he admits that he has turned down two jobs, she leaves, telling him, "Maybe you're wonderfully independent, Murray, or maybe, maybe you're the most extraordinarily selfish person I've ever met." In the end, Sandra comes back, and she and Nick team up to keep Murray somewhat under control.

Themes

Self-concept and Selfishness

When Sandra discovers that Murray has been offered two jobs but has not accepted either of them, she expresses her disappointment in a line that expresses the play's central question: "Maybe you're wonderfully independent, Murray, or maybe, maybe you're the most extraordinarily selfish person I've ever met." The line between self-awareness and self-centeredness is the line that Murray must establish as he moves through the play, and it is this line that determines whether other characters find Murray enchanting or exasperating.

Murray is not close to many people. He is not married and seems to have no friends. He dates many women, but none for long. His sister Elaine is in Europe. His brother Arnold is kind and loyal, but Arnold's relationship with Murray seems entirely one-sided. Nick is a twelve-year-old boy. In Murray's eyes, he is independent and free, with no one telling him what he should be or do. He forms no attachments; he is not in debt to anyone for anything, and he does not ask for anything from others except to be left alone. Only by living this way, he believes, can he maintain his self-image, because intimacy with another person would create demands that would change who he is. And to maintain his uniqueness, he believes, is a high and noble calling. It is all he wants for Nick: "I want him to get to know exactly the special thing he is. . . . I want him to know the subtle, sneaky, important reason why he was born a human being and not a chair." For Murray, it is more important to be true to oneself than to make compromises that please others.

To other people—those who love Murray and those who do not—Murray's striving to maintain his self-concept is mere selfishness. Arnold, who feels responsible for supporting his wife and children, challenges Murray's refusal to work. It is not a highly developed dislike of mediocrity that informs Murray's choices, Arnold claims, but simply "Other People; taking up space, bumping into you, asking for things, making lines to wait on, taking cabs away." Albert cannot understand why Murray is not "at all willing to answer some questions, to give some evidence" to support his case and ultimately finds him guilty of "libertine self-indulgence." Leo Herman, repeatedly humiliated by Murray, criticizes: "the way you brought this kid up, Murray, grotesque atmosphere, *unhealthy*, and you're not even guilty about it." These characters find Murray selfish, not a free spirit; they do not long for the unfettered life he leads. At the end of the play, Murray's choice is clear: If he loves Nick, he will hang on to his job with Leo Herman, whether he finds it personally satisfying or not. The question hanging in the air as the curtain goes down is: Will he do it?

Middle-class Life

Large groups of people in a given class share values and beliefs as well as social and economic status. Sociologists describe, for example, a set of values and beliefs found in

capitalist societies among the middle classes. The middle classes, they observe, are particularly driven by a work ethic, a belief that people's worth derives chiefly from the work they do. People meeting each other for the first time are apt to identify themselves by their jobs, rather than by other characteristics□it is normal and acceptable to ask a new acquaintance "What do you do?" For people who hold the work ethic, a person who does not work is strange, someone to be avoided or examined.

Other qualities embraced by the middle class grow out of the workplace and its need for structure and order. Middle-class values as they are commonly referred to include a preference for punctuality, an acceptance of hierarchy, including respect and submission to those higher up on the corporate ladder, and an acceptance that the schedules and demands of work will shape one's daily life. Accompanying these values are fear and suspicion of anyone who does not adhere to them.

Murray Burns's greatest fear is that he will join the middle class and lose himself. He loves Nick and wants to keep him, but not if it means, as he says, "being judged by people I don't know and who don't know me." He wants to live on his own schedule, create his own holidays, because "You have to own your days and name them, each one of them, every one of them, or else the years go right by and none of them belong to you." He worries that if Nick is placed with a normal family "He'll learn to know everything before it happens, he'll learn to plan, he'll learn how to be one of the nice dead people." The people who disapprove of Murray's way of life do not think he is evil or dangerous or unkind; they see that he is different, and they assume that different is bad. If he were independently wealthy or chronically impoverished, people around him might question less his decision not to work. In practical terms, Murray's struggle is not within himself but is rather a struggle to maintain his chosen way of life within and yet outside the middle class.

Style

Setting

A Thousand Clowns is set in New York City, specifically in the borough of Manhattan, the cultural and economic center of the city. Gardner and his characters know the city well and use references to its boroughs and neighborhoods as a kind of shorthand. Murray and Nick, for example, live above an abandoned Chinese restaurant in a brownstone on the lower West Side, an area that in the 1960s was home to struggling artists, writers, and other nonconformists who were attracted to its interesting nineteenth-century architecture and its low rents. Neighborhoods offered a blend of residential space and small businesses including shops and delicatessens, often combined in one building. Brownstones, deep and narrow apartment buildings made of brown sandstone, provided small and inexpensive living space.

Sandra has grown up in the Bronx, another of New York's five boroughs. Murray and Nick suspect from her accent she is from the Mosholu Parkway neighborhood, but she grew up in another neighborhood, Grand Concourse. Both were areas of relative wealth, with tree-lined streets offering shade to the middle-class residents who had earned and saved enough to escape Manhattan (and to send their daughters to graduate school). Albert's origins in New Jersey make him an outsider even before he begins to speak.

The play is sprinkled with other specific references to neighborhoods and streets. Arnold's office faces the Time-Life Building in Rockefeller Center, a center for television production in the heart of Manhattan. His office on the twenty-second floor of a building in this part of town demonstrates that Arnold is successful and important. Murray has lunch with Sloan on East Fifty-Third Street and takes Nick to the El Bambino Club on Fifty-Second. He also visits or mentions the Empire State Building, New York Harbor where he watches ocean liners arrive and depart, the Central Park zoo, the Statue of Liberty, Park Avenue, Macy's, and the Lincoln Tunnel. Gardner's original Broadway audiences would have recognized these references and made inferences about the events surrounding them based on their awareness that midtown Manhattan is the business center, Park Avenue is home to wealthy people, and so on. Gardner's challenge is to provide enough context so that non-New Yorkers can get a sense of what he is suggesting by each location, without providing so much exposition that the jokes are lost.

Antihero

The traditional literary hero demonstrates particular virtues, such as courage, nobility, or integrity. The term "hero" is sometimes used simply to mean the central character of a work of fiction (also called the "protagonist"), whether or not this character is more worthy than other characters, but more commonly the term refers to a central character

who displays or acquires these heroic qualities. When the protagonist of a modern work lacks heroic qualities, as Murray Burns does, he or she is referred to as an anti-hero.

Murray is not just a common man, no more or less noble than people usually are. He is extraordinarily lacking in certain qualities. For all his talk about wanting to be true to himself, he has little knowledge of his own impulses and desires; he believes, for example, that his attachment to Nick is weak and impermanent. He sleeps with a lot of women, but he is unable or unwilling to establish emotional intimacy. He is not brave enough to confront Sloan or Leo Herman directly but resorts to rudeness and jokes. He is not merely a little self-centered, but may be, as Sandra considers, a "most extraordinarily selfish person." Murray is not quite capable of living in the real world and facing its challenges, but he is charming and sensitive and generally likeable. Ultimately, whatever his faults, the audience is on his side.

Historical Context

Anti-Communism and the 1950s

During the 1950s, there was a widespread belief in the United States that members of the Communist Party posed a serious threat to national security. Although the American Communist Party had existed in the United States since the 1920s as a vocal but ineffectual political force, tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States led many to see communists as allies of the enemy. This in turn led to a restriction of civil rights for those who were members of the Communist Party and even for those who were only suspected of being communists. In the federal government, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the House Un-American Activities Committee worked in secrecy to identify suspected communists and pressured employers to dismiss them. Many people lost their jobs at universities, in labor unions, and in government offices, because of suspected communist activities. In Hollywood and New York, a list of writers who were suspected communists was circulated among the major studios; no one whose name appeared on the "blacklist" could be hired to work on any television show or Hollywood movie. This is what Arnold refers to when he chastises Murray for turning so many employers against him: "Why did you have to go and build your own personal blacklist; why couldn't you just be blacklisted as a Communist like everybody else?"

But the impact of anti-communism was felt far beyond a few industries. For most of the 1950s, average citizens felt unusually constrained, afraid to challenge or question the government, for fear that someone would suspect them of being unpatriotic. There were no outspoken mass movements critical of the president or of government actions. Popular media presented conventional happy families cheerfully engaged in working toward the American Dream. People internalized these images and became relatively passive and accepting; they believed in their government, in hard work, and in trying to get along.

In the last two or three years of the 1950s, the communist scare relaxed. President John Kennedy was inaugurated in 1960, ushering in a period of optimism, youth, and idealism. It was in this new climate that offbeat characters who challenged the status quo□characters like Murray Burns□seemed generally appealing and amusing to a mainstream audience. *A Thousand Clowns* was not the first work to feature an unconventional character; it is one play among many works that celebrated nonconformity during the early 1960s.

The 1960s and Ethnic Comedy

During the 1960s, many writers and executives in the stage, film, and television businesses were Jewish, but few central characters in the media were. It was thought□probably correctly□that the largely Christian middle-class white audiences for these productions would not be interested in Jewish or other "ethnic" characters. One of

the most popular television shows of the decade, *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, which ran from 1961 to 1966, featured a main character who was a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant writer for a television series. The creator of the program, Carl Reiner, was Jewish, and he had modeled the show after his own experiences as a television writer, but studio executives did not think viewers wanted to laugh week after week at the work and home life of a Jewish man, and the role was given to Van Dyke. (In 1968, the television show *Julia* became the first situation comedy starring an African American woman who did not play the role of a domestic servant. There were no major Latino, Asian, Muslim, or gay characters on any comedy show.)

In her essay "The Struggle to Affirm: The Image of Jewish-Americans on Stage" Glenda Frank explains:

Until the 1980s most prominent Jewish playwrights kept ethnic issues at arm's length. Their characters and themes were as American as blue jeans and apple pie. Their protagonists were Melting Pot Everymen, even when identified by ethnic surnames.

In *A Thousand Clowns*, the references to ethnicity are subtle but would have been noticed by Gardner's New York audiences. Murray and his family are Jewish, as are Sandra Markowitz, Leo Herman and the deli owner, Irving R. Feldman; the character who is not is the buttoned-down Albert Amundson. Murray's name, his love of pastrami and other delicatessen food, and his sense of humor, would have signaled his heritage to an attuned audience, but nothing about ethnicity is overtly mentioned in the play. Gardner's next successful play, *I'm Not Rappaport*, repeats the pattern of characters with Jewish names who never mention their Jewishness. Not until 1991, with *Conversations with My Father*, would Gardner write a play that dealt directly with the ethnic identities of his characters.

BOOKRAGS

Critical Overview

A Thousand Clowns was almost universally praised when it opened on Broadway in 1962. John McClain of *Journal American* called it "Merely the best comedy of this season," and Howard Taubman of the *New York Times* found the play "sunny and wistful, sensible and demented, and above all, unfailingly amusing." Some critics commented that the plot was a bit thin and predictable, but agreed that the play as whole was entertaining. John McCarten observed in the *New Yorker* that Gardner is

garrulous, repetitive, and undisciplined, but also pretty funny, and if you ignore the plot of his comedy, which never does resolve itself, and just watch his characters capering about, it should give you a pleasant enough evening.

A Thousand Clowns was nominated for the Tony Award for Best Play in 1963, and Gardner was named "promising playwright for 1961—62" by the New York Drama Critics on the strength of this, his first full-length play.

When the play was revived in 1996 and again in 2001, reviews were less favorable. Although Murray Burns was played by popular actors Judd Hirsch (1996) and Tom Selleck (2001) who created engaging performances, the characters and jokes seemed dated to many reviewers. Thirty or forty years after the play's first opening, audiences were used to more outrageous behavior and language on stage, and it was much more difficult to delight them with mild wackiness. Of the 1996 production, Irene Backalenick commented in *Back Stage* that "What might once have been seen as zany, unconventional behavior now seems tame." Charles Isherwood, reviewing the 2001 production for *Variety*, echoed Backalenick's judgment, noting that "much of Gardner's once-disarming irreverence seems tame and contrived."

Only one serious critical article has examined *A Thousand Clowns*, Thomas J. Scorza's "On the Moral Character of the American Regime" (1978). Scorza, a political scientist, uses the play to examine how American culture "understands itself" and finds that the play "ultimately defends the moral character of conventional American life." The article echoes the sentiments of those drama critics who, even in 1962, interpreted Murray's behavior throughout the play and his decision to get a job at the end of the play as reinforcement of the conventionality Murray purports to argue against. Harold Clurman commented on this idea in the *Nation* when the play was new, observing that "Gardner's merits . . . are at the service of what they deride. The play's anti-conformity is but a reflex of conformity."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

BOOKRAGS

Critical Essay #1

Bily teaches literature and writing at Adrian College in Adrian, Michigan. In this essay, Bily examines Gardner's play as a lesson in integration and compromise.

In one of the most important speeches in *A Thousand Clowns*, Murray explains to Sandra Markowitz that it is a grand thing to not quite know who one is.

It's just that there's all these Sandras running around who you never met before, and it's confusing at first, fantastic, like a Chinese fire drill. But god *damn*, isn't it great to find out how many Sandras there are? Like those little cars in the circus, this tiny red car comes out and putters around, suddenly its doors open and out come a thousand clowns, whooping and hollering and raising hell.

What Murray wants Sandra to understand is that she does not have to limit herself to one image of herself, that she is richer and more interesting than she realizes. Ironically, this is a truth that Murray cannot accept about himself. He is locked into one way of thinking about who he is, and he feels that any attempt he might make to explore the other Murrays would be a threat to his selfhood.

For Murray, the world exists only in black and white. He is either free or trapped. His only choices are "life in the . . . job-hunting raw on the one hand, and eleven fifty-cent double features on the other." If "most things aren't funny" then life is just "one long dental appointment." He can be either the carefree nonconformist, or a dull business drone with no imagination and no personality. There is no middle ground. Any step toward what the rest of the world calls responsible or stable behavior will destroy him, turn him into "an ash tray, a bowl of corn flakes, I wouldn't know me on the street."

Murray also believes that other people are one way or another, good or bad. He is only half joking when he tells Sandra that "People fall into two distinct categories . . . people who like delicatessen, and people who don't like delicatessen." Albert tells Murray, "Your villains and heroes are all so terribly clear to you, and I am obviously one of the villains." And Murray refuses Sloan's job offer because "Sloan is an idiot." Murray makes quick judgments about people and does not change them.

Of course, Murray is right in what he tells Sandra about those clowns. People have many facets to their personality and part of being mature and whole is balancing the competing demands that arise from this internal complexity and the complexity of the world. People learn as they grow up that they can and ought to behave differently in different situations and that managing varying expectations is necessary for thriving in the adult world. Through the course of the play, Murray has to learn to reject his all-or-nothing way of seeing himself. He has to learn to compromise. As he encounters the other adult characters in turn, he has the opportunity to see how degrees of this kind of integration lead people to succeed or fail in their lives.

The least compromising character is social worker Albert Amundson. When he is working, he is all business, and he will not be distracted from his prepared list of questions, even by the humor and charm of Nick and Murray. The people he meets in his work are not individuals, but cases, and he treats every family the same way. His greatest worry during his investigation of Murray is that he and Sandra have "lost all control," as of course they have. The humor in the exchanges between Murray and Albert in act 1 derives primarily from the conflict between two bull-headed people. Although viewers sympathies lie more with Murray than with Albert, they understand immediately that the two men do not speak the same language, and they find humor in their inability to understand each other. Murray and Albert are decent men, and both want what is best for Nick, but because neither man has the will at this moment to see the world through more than one lens, neither can reach a resolution. Because neither will take even one step toward the other, they will never meet in the middle.

As rigid as Albert is at work, Sandra admits that he does have a more flexible side and that "He's really a very nice person when he's not on cases." Albert has learned one thing that Murray has not: that it is possible to adopt a professional demeanor for work and relax into another personality the rest of the day. In Albert's line of work, it is often more appropriate to behave with some detachment, as experienced social workers know. And in act 2 Albert shows kindness and decency in coming in person to deliver the news that there is to be a hearing to determine Murray's fitness as a guardian. Albert comes back because he has done what Murray cannot do: he has reconsidered the conversation of the day before and thought about it from Murray's point of view. In this second visit, Albert knows that he will not be received cordially, he knows that he cannot hold his own in a conversation with Murray, but he tries anyway to see and articulate the complexity of Murray's situation, only to be met with more mockery. Albert says sadly, "You can't really listen to me."

Another character who tries to help Murray is Arnold, who used to be as carefree as his sister and brother. Twenty years earlier, he enjoyed startling people just for fun, and he once got himself fired from a salesman job by pulling a practical joke. But now Arnold has a wife and children, and he is responsible for supporting them. He has clients, including Murray, who depend on him and television executives who rely on him to deal with them honestly and fairly. Arnold has accepted his responsibilities. When Arnold says, "business, like they say, is business," he demonstrates his understanding that some things are *not* business. When he says, "I'm lucky. I'm gifted. I have a talent for surrender," he is not being ironic or self-pitying. Part of being a functioning adult is knowing when to give in. Arnold knows how to compartmentalize, to inhabit different worlds, to compromise. This does not make Arnold weak or confused; he has a strong sense of self and of self-worth. He is "the best possible Arnold Burns."

Leo Herman, who makes his living playing a character, Chuckles the Chipmunk, demonstrates the multifaceted self at its least effective. Leo is a children's television host who does not really like children, a comedian who isn't funny. When Murray sees Leo, he sees a man who does not know who he is and does not like who he is. Murray has worried that if he goes back to work he will cease to be himself, and this does seem to have happened to Leo, who says, "I keep touching myself to make sure I'm still there.

Murray, I get the feeling, maybe I vanished when I wasn't looking." Leo is what Murray is afraid of becoming: not a healthy multifaceted adult but "the biggest phony you ever met."

One character just outside the play stands as a cautionary example to Murray, showing him what he could become if he followed his dedication to nonconformity to its logical conclusion. Murray's sister Elaine is the extreme free spirit, the completely selfish person who allows nothingnot even the responsibility of being Nick's motherget in the way of her own enjoyment. Her "well-practiced theory on the meaning of life" falls, as Murray describes it, "somewhere to the left of Whoopie." Like her brother Murray, she moves from lover to lover and from interest to interest without committing to anyone or anything. Perhaps she is leading the life Murray would lead if it were not for Nick. But because of his love for Nick, Murray sees clearly that Elaine's selfishness is indefensible.

So what is Murray to do? He does not want to be as selfish as Elaine or as phony as Leo. He thinks he knows who he is: a fun-loving, enthusiastic free spirit. Are there more Murrays trapped inside his car, waiting to come out? Sandra has told him, "I think, Murray, that you live in a much, much larger closet than I do." What should he make of the examples of Arnold and Albert? Is their daily choice to take their jobs seriously a denial of a facet of their personality or an acceptance of another?

Sandra's challenge is the opposite of Murray's. Sandra begins the play with no sense of self; she allows herself to be manipulated and defined entirely by the world around her. Murray is right about her needing to "meet all these Sandras" to find out who she is. She has only recently finished graduate school and admits that "The minute I got out of school I wanted to go right back inside." Although she has a doctorate in psychology and Albert has only a bachelor's degree, she tends to defer to Albert, even when she disagrees with him. As a psychological case worker, she is called upon to be detached and disinterested about the cases she handles, but after making a few mistakes in her first three months on the job she concludes, "I am unsuited to my profession." Sandra still lives with her parents and allows her mother to pick out her clothes, "which are obviously more suited to a much older woman."

When Sandra quarrels with Albert and then decides to stay the night with Murray, she is taking a step toward independence. She is beginning to assert herself and to ask herself what she wants. (But it is only a small step: she does hide in the closet when Albert arrives.) Her taste still runs toward the conventional, and when she redecorates Murray's apartment she removes all traces of his unique personality to create something that reflects neither her own taste nor Murray's, but looks like a page from the *Ladies' Home Journal*. Presumably, as Sandra continues to develop, she will move past rejecting other people's ideas about her and strengthen her sense of when *not* to give in. She will face all those Sandras one by one and find a place for each one.

As the play ends, Murray has agreed to come back to work for Leo, and he stands helplessly as Nick and Sandra put away his clocks and radios. According to the stage directions, he knows he cannot stop their redecorating, so he "shrugs, defeated."

Audiences find the ending of *A Thousand Clowns* to be mixed. Murray clearly makes the right decision in going back to the television show so he can keep his family together. Murray and Sandra will be good for each other. With his encouragement, she will explore more possibilities, and she will help Murray stay focused. Still, it is hard not to feel disappointed that Murray has to sacrifice himself for the cause. Murray would feel better about his new life if he would embrace his own metaphor, if he would only believe that Murray the funny writer, Murray the respectful employee, Murray the responsible father, and Murray the carefree soul are just a few of his thousand clowns.

Source: Cynthia Bily, Critical Essay on *A Thousand Clowns*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Adaptations

A Thousand Clowns was made into a feature film in 1965, with Gardner's screenplay receiving an Academy Award nomination. Directed by Fred Coe, it stars Jason Robards as Murray, reprising his Broadway role. It is available on video and DVD from MGM Home Entertainment.

Topics for Further Study

The job of the New York Bureau of Child Welfare in the play is to determine whether or not Murray and Nick function well as a family. They seem particularly interested in the fact that Nick's birth parents were not married to each other. What different kinds of families do the people you know live in today? What are the qualities that make up a good parent or a functioning family?

The *Chuckles the Chipmunk* television show seems to be about equal parts entertainment and advertisement for Chuckle-Chip potato chips. In that regard, do you think television aimed at children has improved or deteriorated since the 1960s? Are children's programs today intended more for providing entertainment or for selling products?

A director of a stage play or a film works with the script on the page, but can guide the way an audience interprets a character by choosing who will play the parts and how they will deliver the lines. How would you cast a stage or film production of *A Thousand Clowns*? Which actors working today capture the essential qualities of each character as you perceive them?

A few years after its Broadway opening, *A Thousand Clowns* was made into a film. Instead of confining the action to Murray's one-room apartment and Arnold's office, the film was able to move throughout the city of New York. If you were making a film version of the play, what scenes would you add or relocate to take advantage of this opportunity?

Compare and Contrast

1960s: Children's television shows like *Chuckles the Chipmunk* are produced locally in most major cities. Broadcast live and staged in front of a live audience, they typically feature a male host who shows cartoons, reads the comics from the local newspaper, and does short comedy sketches.

Today: With the exception of a few locally produced Public Television programs, nearly all children's programming is produced in New York or California and broadcast over the major networks or cable channels.

1960s: Business offices use the latest communications technology. Arnold Burns's New York office has a "special speaker-phone" with a separate speaker attached so others in the room can hear a phone caller. Gardner needs three sentences to explain this technology in his stage directions.

Today: Businesses still are the first market for new communication technologies, such as computer servers and routers, video conferencing, and satellite networking. Speaker phones are small, inexpensive, and found in many private homes.

1960s: An administrative assistant in an office in a large city makes a starting salary of about ninety dollars a week, or less than $5,000 a year. It is enough to support a single person in a small apartment.

Today: An administrative assistant in an office in a large city starts at about $20,000 to $25,000 dollars a year. Rents are so high that most single-income families at this income level cannot afford to live in Manhattan.

1960s: To get relatively up-to-the-minute weather information, residents of cities can dial a local phone number twenty-four hours a day and listen to a recorded message. Another call to another number gives the accurate time of day.

Today: Cable weather channels give frequently updated world, national, and local weather information, as do many Internet sites.

What Do I Read Next?

Gardner's play *I'm Not Rappaport* (1985) won the 1986 Tony Award for best play. It tells the story of how a grumpy Jewish socialist helps his almost-blind African American friend save his job as an apartment superintendent. Most of the dialogue takes place on a park bench, as the elderly men debate how they should spend their remaining years.

The Odd Couple (1965), one of the funniest plays by Gardner's contemporary Neil Simon, features two New York City men, the fastidious Felix Unger and the slob Oscar Madison, who become roommates. As the two struggle with their conflicting temperaments, they also struggle to deal with their failed marriages and their inability to live up to middle-class values.

Catch-22 (1961), by Joseph Heller, is a novel about Captain Yossarian, a member of a bomber squadron in World War II who is desperate to get home. Like Murray Burns, Yossarian is a sympathetic character, although he lacks what would be ordinarily considered redeeming qualities.

The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit (1955), by Sloan Wilson, was a bestselling novel in its time, and the title is frequently referred to today, even though the book is not widely read. It describes the striving of Tom Rath to climb the corporate ladder, which he believes will bring him and his family happiness.

The Organization Man (1956), by sociologist William H. Whyte, describes corporate culture following World War II. Whyte analyzes how the bureaucracies and social pressures of the 1950s and 1960s aided corporate profits while dehumanizing and demoralizing workers.

Further Study

Greenfield, Thomas Allen, *Work and the Work Ethic in American Drama 1920—1970*, University of Missouri Press, 1982.

This book, as its title suggests, explores dramatic treatments of work life. *A Thousand Clowns* is mentioned only briefly, as an example of how work divides people, especially among the middle class. Greenfield places Gardner in this regard alongside Neil Simon and Edward Albee, who also dealt in the 1960s with issues of work.

Guernsey, Otis L., Jr., ed., "Humor," in *Broadway Song and Story: Playwrights, Lyricists, Composers Discuss Their Hits*, Dodd, Mead, 1985, pp. 371—83.

This chapter is a transcribed conversation between Gardner and Russell Baker, Jules Feiffer, Terrence McNally, and Joseph Stein, about how they write comedy for the theater and about the early radio comics who inspired their work.

Hollis, Tim, *Hi There, Boys and Girls: America's Local Children's TV Programs*, University Press of Mississippi, 2001.

This serious review of the history of children's programming is written with a great deal of humor. It covers the genre from its beginnings in the 1940s until the demise of local programming in the 1970s, describing shows and their hosts in every state.

Unger, Irwin, and Debi Unger, eds., *The Times Were a Changin': The Sixties Reader*, Three Rivers Press, 1998.

This anthology, compiled by a historian and a journalist, includes more than fifty essays, articles, and other documents that chronicle the major social, cultural, and political issues of the 1960s in the United States. The editors' commentary is balanced and provides necessary and insightful contextual information.

Bibliography

Backalenick, Irene, Review of *A Thousand Clowns*, in *Back Stage*, Vol. 37, No. 30, July 26, 1996, p. 44.

Clurman, Harold, Review of *A Thousand Clowns*, in the *Nation*, May 5, 1962, p. 408.

Frank, Glenda, "The Struggle to Affirm: The Image of Jewish-Americans on Stage," in *Staging Difference: Cultural Pluralism in American Theatre and Drama*, edited by Marc Maufort, Peter Lang, 1995, p. 245.

Gardner, Herb, *A Thousand Clowns*, in *Herb Gardner: The Collected Plays*, Applause Books, 2001.

Isherwood, Charles, Review of *A Thousand Clowns*, in *Variety*, Vol. 383, No. 8, July 16, 2001, p. 24.

McCarten, John, "Assorted Oddballs," in the *New Yorker*, April 14, 1962, p. 106.

McClain, John, "Best Comedy of the Season," in *New York Theatre Critics' Reviews*, 1962, p. 303, originally published in *Journal American*, April 6, 1962.

Scorza, Thomas J., "On the Moral Character of the American Regime: *A Thousand Clowns* Revisited," in the *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 77, Spring 1978, pp. 25—41.

Taubman, Howard, "Theatre: *A Thousand Clowns* Opens," in the *New York Times*, April 6, 1962, p. 31.

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

©1997-2002; ©2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc.

Gale and Design® and Thomson Learning™ are trademarks used herein under license.

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

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any

form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

For permission to use material from this product, submit your request via Web at http://www.gale-edit.com/permissions, or you may download our Permissions Request form and submit your request by fax or mail to:

Permissions Department
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

Permissions Hotline:
248-699-8006 or 800-877-4253, ext. 8006
Fax: 248-699-8074 or 800-762-4058

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all copyright notices, the acknowledgments constitute an extension of the copyright notice.

While every effort has been made to secure permission to reprint material and to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, The Gale Group, Inc. does not guarantee the accuracy of the data contained herein. The Gale Group, Inc. accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

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". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

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". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

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 memberseducational 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