Three Thanksgivings Study Guide

Three Thanksgivings by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

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Introduction

"Three Thanksgivings," by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, was first published in Gilman's magazine, *Forerunner,* in 1909. The story and many of the other works published in the magazine have received very little critical attention, since most critics have tended to focus on Gilman's novella, *The Yellow Wallpaper.* Nevertheless, "Three Thanksgivings" contains themes that are common to many of Gilman's stories, including women's struggle for economic independence despite social pressures and the possibility of women being forced to enter into undesirable marriages. The protagonist, Mrs. Delia Morrison, is a widow who wishes to remain in the house that her father built and where she has lived most of her life. However, in two years, Mrs. Morrison owes a small mortgage to Mr. Peter Butts, a persistent man who hopes to marry her. If she cannot pay the mortgage and interest, she will have to sell the house and live with one of her children or marry Mr. Butts and live with him in her house as his servant. In addition to sharing the traits of many of her other stories, Gilman's "Three Thanksgivings" gives a portrait of the times, accurately reflecting the attitudes toward women that were prevalent in the early twentieth century—when women were fighting for many rights, including economic independence and the right to vote. A copy of the story can be found in *The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Writings,* which was published by The Modern Library in 2000.

Author Biography

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was born as Charlotte Anna Perkins on July 3, 1860, in Hartford, Connecticut. Gilman's father, Frederick Perkins—a librarian and editor—deserted the family when the author was an infant. As a result, Gilman, her siblings, and her mother lived with relatives, including the famous abolitionist author Harriet Beecher Stowe. Under the instruction of Stowe and her two sisters, Isabella Beecher Hooker and Catharine Beecher, two feminist activists, the young Gilman developed her independent spirit and desire for equality.

Despite her doubts about the institution of marriage, Gilman married Charles Walter Stetson in 1884, at the age of twenty-four. The union was disastrous. Within a year, Gilman had given birth to a daughter, Katherine, and had entered into a state of deep depression. Under the advice of a noted neurologist, Gilman tried a cure of bed rest and seclusion. The cure only made Gilman's condition worse. However, it did provide Gilman with the background for her first published novella, *The Yellow Wallpaper*—first published in the *New England Magazine* in 1890; published on its own in 1899—which depicts such a treatment failing miserably. Although Gilman later admitted that the work was merely an attempt to get back at the neurologist who suggested her rest cure, it is generally considered her finest work and a key feminist work. During the 1890s, Gilman produced two other works that displayed her feminist activism: *In This Our World* (1893), a mainly satiric collection of poetry, and *Women and Economics* (1898), an indictment of a male-dominated society that suppressed women.

Gilman's second marriage in 1900—to her cousin, George Houghton Gilman—was more successful. Her second husband was sympathetic to Gilman's feminist activism and encouraged her in her efforts. One of Gilman's most notable endeavors was *Forerunner,* a self-published journal that Gilman wrote, edited, and produced for seven years, from 1909 to 1916. Each issue included a wide range of writings, including short stories that addressed women's issues. One of the first short stories published in *Forerunner* was "Three Thanksgivings" (1909). In addition to shorter fiction, Gilman also used *Forerunner* to publish novels in serial form. The most famous of these is *Herland* (1915), a utopian fantasy in which three men from the United States discover a fabled country that is ruled entirely by women.

After *Forerunner,* Gilman published only two more books, *His Religion and Hers: A Study of the Faith of Our Fathers and the Work of Our Mothers* (1923) and *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography* (1935). The latter appeared posthumously, since Gilman had committed suicide the same year, after being diagnosed with an inoperable form of breast cancer.

Plot Summary

When "Three Thanksgivings" begins, Mrs. Delia Morrison, a fifty-year-old widow, has just finished reading two letters—one from Andrew and one from Jean, her two children. Both have sent travel money to Mrs. Morrison, asking her to come and stay with them for Thanksgiving. In addition, they have both requested that she sell her house. Andrew is most interested in Mrs. Morrison's safety, whereas Jean's husband, Joe, mainly wants to invest her money in his own business.

Mrs. Morrison ponders her financial situation. She has stopped taking in boarders at the Welcome House, a spacious manor built by her deceased father. She hates having boarders and decides that it is useless anyway, since the money is only enough to pay the interest—but not the principal—on her small mortgage. After dinner, Mr. Peter Butts, a friend and lifelong suitor of Mrs. Morrison, pays her a visit. Mr. Butts holds the mortgage on the Welcome House and tries to use this fact to pressure Mrs. Morrison into marriage. He says that if she cannot pay her loan when it is due in two years, she will either have to sell the house or marry him anyway. He also believes that she will not be able to raise the money on her own. Nevertheless, Mrs. Morrison says that she will find a way and politely declines Mr. Butts's offer.

Mrs. Morrison decides to go to Andrew's house for Thanksgiving. Although Andrew and his wife, Annie, are gracious, Mrs. Morrison is not happy. She is used to her spacious home, so the room they give her feels very small. Although Mrs. Morrison is a skilled manager—from her many years as a minister's wife—there is no place for her to help out; Annie, Andrew's wife, is more than capable enough to help Andrew in his own ministry. In addition, Andrew, Annie, and their neighbors insist on treating Mrs. Morrison as if she is old. She only stays a week before returning to the Welcome House, determined to save her home.

Mrs. Morrison makes a thorough inventory of her assets, finding that her father's political meetings and her husband's religious events have helped to increase the stock of supplies in the house. She finds hundreds of extra chairs and a large stock of bedding, towels, and table linens, but she rules out the idea of opening a hotel because the other hotel in Haddleton is never full. She finds a large stock of china and cups, but she rules out the idea of a girls' school, which would take time and money to establish. As she starts to think of all of the women she knows in the community, she has a brainstorm and gets to work.

Shortly thereafter, word spreads that Mrs. Morrison is going to entertain all of the country women at the Welcome House. Hundreds show up to hear Mrs. Isabelle Carter Blake—a noted social activist and family woman—and her friend, a European countess, talk about the rapid growth of women's clubs in the United States and Europe. Over the next few days, Mrs. Blake goes to many church meetings, encouraging the farm women to start their own dues-based clubhouse in Haddleton, which they could use on Saturdays when they are in town doing their shopping. The women think it would be too expensive to find a facility and hire a manager, but Mrs. Morrison offers to convert the

Welcome House into a women's club and to manage the organization for a mere ten cents a week from each woman. By the time Mrs. Blake leaves, the Haddleton Rest and Improvement Club has been established at the Welcome House. Hundreds of women join immediately, and the small weekly due paid by each woman adds up quickly.

The next Thanksgiving, Mrs. Morrison goes to Jean's house. The room that Jean gives her is small, like the one in Andrew's house. However, instead of being coddled, Mrs. Morrison gets put to work helping out with Jean's four children, ruining her silk clothes in the process. At the same time, Joe urges her to sell the house and come and stay with them, because he could use the capital for his business. As at Andrew's house, Mrs. Morrison stays only one week before leaving.

Mrs. Morrison pays her yearly interest to Mr. Butts and renews her efforts at growing the club and paying off her loan. Using management skills and a refined personality that she has honed as both a senator's daughter and a minister's wife, Mrs. Morrison expands the range of the organization. She rents out rooms for all sorts of club meetings, including boys' clubs, and invites speakers and other entertainment. Mrs. Morrison makes a nice profit the first season, and the second season is even better.

By the next Thanksgiving, Mrs. Morrison has made enough profit to pay back her interest and principal on the loan, as well as a little extra money. She sends part of this money to Andrew and Jean, inviting them and their families to come and stay with her for Thanksgiving. After dinner, Mr. Butts shows up, thinking he will be taking either the house or Mrs. Morrison—or preferably both. He is therefore very surprised when she hands him a check for his interest and principal and says that she could not possibly have made all that money from her club and that she must have had help from her family. Nevertheless, he takes the check and leaves.

Summary

As a widow with two grown children, Delia Morrison lives alone. Both her children want her to live with them; however, she has letters in hand from each of them. The first letter is from her son Andrew. He tells his mother that she should come live with him and his wife Annie. He has a room for her. He suggests that she rent out her house for income or sell it and invest the money. He says that her maid, Sally, is getting too old to help her. Andrew then invites her for Thanksgiving, enclosing travel money with the letter and asking her to stay with them afterward.

The second letter is from Delia's daughter Jean. She has also invited her mother to come for Thanksgiving and then stay on with them. She and her husband Joe offer her a room in their home. Like Andrew, Jean too has sent travel money. Jean wants her mother to see her children; her eldest baby has grown older and she has newborn twins. Jean's husband wants Delia to sell her house and invest the money in his business; he will pay her interest on her investment. Delia places both letters in her desk.

Delia is a tall, attractive woman whose appearance commands respect. She lives in the Welcome House that her father, Senator Welcome, built. She was born and raised there; it is the finest house in town. Even after traveling abroad with her father, Delia always though the Welcome House was the best house. When her husband died, Delia had to take out a small mortgage on the house. She rents rooms to boarders to help pay the interest on the loan; she still has to pay back the $2000 principal. Delia doesn't like housing boarders but she handles it with patience.

One November evening, Sally, the maid, approaches Delia to announce dinner. Delia goes to the table with as much dignity as if she had 20 guests. After dinner she receives a visit from Mr. Peter Butts. He is the man who arranged the mortgage loan for her.

Mr. Butts is a stout, somewhat pompous blond-haired man. He is a self-made man; Delia has known him since they were children, when he was poor and she was rich. He is also a prideful man who is happy that their positions have changed. Mr. Butts tries to propose marriage to her with the notion that, since she cannot pay the principal on her mortgage, she will not have to sell the house if she marries him.

He has proposed to her before; the first time was when they were young. The second time was shortly after her husband died. He had always been a friend of hers as well as her husband's; he was a member of the church where Delia's husband was the minister.

She will not marry Butts at any price, preferring to take in boarders forever if she has to. She still loves her husband and imagines meeting him again one day in Heaven. She doesn't want to have to explain how she was forced to marry Peter Butts. So she tells Peter that she doesn't want to marry him; she doesn't want to marry anyone. He reminds her that the principal on her mortgage is due two years from Thanksgiving. She says that maybe by then, she will find a way to come up with the money.

Delia decides to visit her son Andrew and his wife Annie for Thanksgiving. They have a room set up for her. It is a decent size and has two windows with a nice view. Andrew, like his late father, is a minister. Delia was never strong on the doctrine but her husband never knew this; she didn't discuss it with him.

During the week that Delia stays with her son, the older members of Andrew's church invite her out. They all get along well with her but it makes her feel old to be around them. Andrew's house and town are too small for Delia. She is used to the spaciousness of the Welcome House and is eager to get home. Andrew is hurt and disappointed that she won't stay with them for good. She tells him not to take it personally; she just loves her home.

When Delia returns to the Welcome House, she starts to think about ways to come up with the money to pay off her mortgage. She begins to evaluate her assets. She has a lot of furniture, especially a large selection of chairs in the attic from when her father held political meetings; the chairs would not be worth much, though. She has an extensive collection of linens from housing boarders.

She has also has a large china collection from holding church receptions in their home when her husband was alive. It makes her think about how well suited her home would be as a hotel; but the Hoskins House, the nearby hotel, is never full, so there is certainly no need for another hotel in town. She considers opening a boarding house for schoolgirls, but the preparation and time involved in establishing this would be too much. Mr. Butts would not give her the time.

Just as her father, Senator Welcome, had been, Delia was well-liked in her town. When her husband worked as a minister, Delia often entertained the women from town and the surrounding county. This gives her an idea.

Delia enlists the help of a friend of hers named Mrs. Isabelle Carter Blake; Delia and Mrs. Blake had gone to school together. Mrs. Blake is well known worldwide for her work with children and for a book she has written. Delia invites every woman in the area to meet Mrs. Blake at her house. Mrs. Blake is also friends with an Italian Countess and when news of this spreads among the invitees, excitement about the event increases.

On the day of the gathering, hundreds of guests arrive. Both Mrs. Blake and the Countess attend Delia's party. The guests are impressed with Delia's ease with these eminent women. Soon Mrs. Blake addresses the women, telling them about the work she does and how she is helped in that work by women's clubs. She explains that women's clubs are forming in cities and towns all over the country. Women form the clubs to help one another and Mrs. Blake says that it is time that their town, Haddleton, had one.

The Countess addresses the audience too. She gives her history, explaining that she is an American who married in Italy. She too talks to the women about women's clubs.

The day after the gathering the Countess leaves but Mrs. Blake stays in town. She speaks at several church meetings, where she addresses even larger groups of

admirers. She tells her audiences that they are in need of a "Rest and Improvement Club." She thinks that the women need a place where they can rest after coming into town to do their shopping, somewhere they can meet with other women to talk and relax. She says that all they need to do is organize the club and pay a small regular fee.

The women have many questions, the most frequent of which is where the club should meet. Mrs. Blake suggests that Delia host the club at the Welcome House; she has the room and can run the club more cheaply than if they had to rent space. Mrs. Blake gives out facts and figures that explain the cost of running the club. She suggests that each member's fee should be 10 cents a week.

Then Mrs. Blake asks Delia if she can feed the women for that amount. Delia says that, for that amount, she can offer them tea, coffee, cheese and crackers. More importantly, she says, she can offer them a place to rest and hold meetings, as well as a reading room.

By the time Mrs. Blake leaves, the women agree to form the club. Hundreds of women join. There is a lot of work involved in running the club. On Saturdays the house is full and on Sundays Delia stays in bed to rest; but she likes having the club and even likes the work. A year flies by quickly.

The next Thanksgiving, Delia visits her daughter Jean for a week. Jean gives her mother a room that is the same size as the one at Andrew's house. This room is one floor higher and has a sloped ceiling. The house is full of babies. Jean's oldest child is getting around on his own and getting into everything. There are also the twins and a new baby. The family has only one overworked servant and one nursemaid, which is inadequate.

Jean's husband Joe tells Delia that his business is doing well but that he desperately needs capital. He urges her to come live with them; he says it would be a big help to Jean. Jean can't visit her mother because she can't leave the children and she rarely has visitors because they live in a suburb that is made up of equally busy mothers. Delia declines and returns home after her weeklong stay.

Shortly after Delia's return, Peter Butts calls on her. She has paid him interest on her mortgage and he wants to know how she came up with the money; he wonders if she somehow swindled it out of the women from the club. Delia tells him that his interest is modest and easy to meet; she asks him if he knows how high interest rates are in Colorado. Women have the vote there, Delia adds.

Then Butts warns her that she only has one more year to come up with the principal for the mortgage or else she will have to sell her house. This statement fills Delia with renewed energy to continue the women's club.

Delia is a good manager. The women would never have agreed to a fee of five dollars a year, but when it is broken down into payments of 10 cents per week, even the poorest woman feels that she can manage the expense. The money never has to be collected

because the women always bring it with them. Sally presents a cash box at the door as they arrive for tea.

So Delia focuses her efforts on enlarging the membership and keeping up attendance. She is good at this; she plans carefully, setting up different departments: she has a boys club and reading clubs and study clubs. She also hosts meetings of all kinds in her home. Some are meetings that used to be held at the church but are now held at the Welcome House. Others are new meetings. Delia provides refreshments for each club and meeting and the women return every week.

After the first six months, the club has 500 members. On Saturdays Delia hires two helpers for half a day each and pays them each 50 cents. She also stocks the library with new magazines for $50 a year. Another $100 a year pays for fuel, lights and other miscellaneous expenses. She is able to provide refreshments to the members for four cents per person.

At the end of the first year, Delia has earned enough to pay the interest on her mortgage and has saved $1000 toward the principal. She keeps her money behind her bed in a safe that no one, not even Sally, knows about. In the second year, the club does even better. She makes more than $1000 in profit and has enough money to pay off her mortgage.

When Thanksgiving nears again, Delia writes to her son and daughter, inviting them and their families for Thanksgiving at the Welcome House. She sends them the travel money and they all come to visit. There is plenty of room and plenty of food at Delia's house. At dinner, Delia carves the turkey with the grace of a queen.

After Thanksgiving, Mr. Butts calls on Delia once more. She hands him a check for the remaining interest and principal of her mortgage. Mr. Butts hates to receive it. He says he didn't know she has a bank account and asks her where she got the money. He cannot imagine that it may have come from running the women's club.

Delia tells him that she appreciates his interest but she doesn't answer his question. Mr. Butts assumes that friends must have loaned her the money. He warns her that she will be no better off if she takes a loan from someone else. Delia tells him not to quarrel with her over money and says that she wants to be friends. Mr. Butts then leaves.

Analysis

Three Thanksgivings by Charlotte Perkins Gilman was originally published in 1909, illustrating that the author was very much ahead of her time with the story's overall theme of early feminism. In this story the protagonist, Delia Morrison, may be forced to sell her home because she cannot come up with the principal payment for her mortgage. Peter Butts, a long-time friend of Delia's, tries to convince her to marry him in order to keep her house. At the same time, Delia's two children want her to sell her house and move in with them.

It seems, however, that each of her children is motivated by a desire for financial benefit. This is foreshadowed early in the story when Delia's daughter Jean suggests that her mother sell the house and invest the profits in Jean's husband's business. The theme continues when Delia visits her son Andrew on the first of the three Thanksgivings. Andrew is a minister who benefits from his mother's presence because, when she socializes with members of his congregation, this in turn increases his popularity (and, presumably, church donations).

The story's title comes from the notion that Delia has two years to come up with the money to keep her house. The first Thanksgiving is when Mr. Butts initially warns Delia that she must pay off her mortgage in two years. On the second Thanksgiving, Delia has the money to pay the interest on the mortgage, showing her initial move toward independence. By the third Thanksgiving, Delia has earned more than enough money to pay off the remaining debt on her house. Each passing Thanksgiving marks a stage in Delia's transition from powerlessness to empowerment.

Delia uses the frightening prospect of losing her beloved home as motivation to become self-sufficient. After much consideration, she decides to open her house to the public for a women's club. Delia's managerial skills and popularity with the women in her community help her to succeed.

The idea of the women's club is symbolic of the idea of early feminism. When Delia enlists the help of a well-known friend, Mrs. Blake, her friend explains that the club is a place where women help each other. This statement suggests empowerment; that is, women utilize the club as a resource to help each other move forward, without reliance on men.

Mrs. Blake's statement about women helping each other also foreshadows Delia's triumph and good fortune. Before opening the club, Delia took in boarders to help her pay her mortgage interest. She disliked having to do this, but handled this necessary activity with patience and dignity. Renting rooms to strangers, however, was not enabling Delia to meet her financial needs.

By contrast, the presence in her house of women whom she does know does help Delia to achieve her goals. Symbolically, this aspect of the story suggests that Delia cannot move forward while surrounded by strangers. In essence, the idea of women helping each other becomes tangible in the case of Delia Morrison. The women's club leads to her achievement of financial independence.

Delia achieves more than just financial independence by running the women's club; she becomes a part of the larger progress of women. Although this is revealed at the end of the story, it is foreshadowed during Delia's conversation with Peter Butts on the second Thanksgiving. When Butts asks Delia how she came up with the interest payment, she replies that his interest is low and therefore easy to meet. She explains this remark by asking him if he knows how high interest rates are in Colorado. As a side note, she also tells him that women vote in Colorado. This latter statement reveals Delia's interest in the progress of women in society and suggests that running the club and meeting a

great variety of women has perhaps widened her perspective on society and the world at large.

Other symbols of Delia's independence are revealed on the third Thanksgiving. Before the first Thanksgiving, Delia's children had both sent her travel money to help her visit them during the holiday. On the third Thanksgiving, however, Delia sends them money to come visit her, proving that she has become a breadwinner.

Then at Thanksgiving dinner, Delia carves the turkey for her extended family. Given that this responsibility usually belongs to the head of the family, it is evident that this act is symbolic of just how far Delia has come. She is now fully independent and is truly the head of her household.

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Characters

Andrew

Andrew, a minister, is Mrs. Morrison's son, who is concerned about his mother's welfare. Andrew encourages his mother to come and live with them, saying that she can sell her house and he will invest the money for her. Andrew is worried that Mrs. Morrison cannot take care of herself, and he is overjoyed when she comes to stay with him and his wife, Annie, the first Thanksgiving. However, Andrew's house is small compared to his mother's, and Mrs. Morrison is not comfortable there. Andrew is somewhat angry when his mother leaves after a week to return to the Welcome House. For the third Thanksgiving, Mrs. Morrison makes enough from her women's club to send travel money so that Andrew and Annie can come stay with her.

Annie

Annie, Andrew's wife, is very efficient in helping her husband with his ministry. Because of this, there is nothing for Mrs. Morrison to do when she stays at their house. Also, Annie insists on treating Mrs. Morrison like an old woman and needlessly coddles her.

Mrs. Isabelle Carter Blake

Mrs. Isabelle Carter Blake, a noted social activist, is one of Mrs. Morrison's childhood friends. Mrs. Morrison invites her to speak at the Welcome House, where Mrs. Blake encourages the Haddleton women to organize their own rest and improvement club. Mrs. Blake also speaks to individual churches in Haddleton, where she suggests that the Haddleton women rely on Mrs. Morrison and the Welcome House for their club needs. Mrs. Blake is a very influential woman because she has done wonderful work with children, has successfully raised her own six children, and has just written a novel.

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Mr. Peter Butts

Mr. Peter Butts is a persistent suitor of Mrs. Morrison, and he also holds the small mortgage on her house. Mr. Butts, a wealthy entrepreneur, has pursued Mrs. Morrison's hand in marriage since they were both young, when he was poor and she was rich. Although he is not unkind, he is tactless and takes great, visible pride in the fact that their financial situations have reversed. Mr. Butts was friends with Mrs. Morrison's husband and is Mrs. Morrison's friend, although she does not wish to marry him. Still, Mr. Butts continues to encourage the now-widowed Mrs. Morrison to marry him. The greatest pressure comes from the loan that Mrs. Morrison has taken from him. He hoped, when loaning her the money for her small mortgage, that Mrs. Morrison would not be able to pay the money in the end. He thinks that this situation would cause Mrs. Morrison to marry him so that she can keep her house, which he knows she loves and refuses to sell. In addition to his desire for Mrs. Morrison, Mr. Butts also desires to own her house, the Welcome House, and thinks that he will get both in the end. He is confident that Mrs. Morrison will not be able to pay the loan, since she is a single woman and, he thinks, a single woman cannot make much money in two years. Therefore, he is very surprised when Mrs. Morrison's women's club pays off her debt, and he believes that Mrs. Morrison's family has helped her pay the loan. At the end of the story, they go their separate ways.

The Countess

The Countess is an American-born, Italian woman, who uses inspirational stories of European women's clubs to help convince the women of Haddleton to form their own rest and improvement club. The Countess is a friend of Mrs. Isabelle Carter Blake.

Jean

Jean, who also goes by Jeannie, is Mrs. Morrison's daughter. Jean encourages his mother to come to live with them and says that her husband will sell her house and invest the money in his own business and then pay her interest. Jean and Joe are overjoyed when Mrs. Morrison comes to stay with them the second Thanksgiving. Unlike Annie, who needs no help, Jean depends heavily on her mother to help take care of Jean's four children. Jean also babbles constantly about her problems. As a result, Mrs. Morrison is not comfortable at Jean's house either, and she leaves after a week. For the third Thanksgiving, Mrs. Morrison makes enough from her women's club to send travel money so that Jean's family can come stay with her.

Jeannie

See Jean

Joe

Joe is Jean's husband, who focuses on getting Mrs. Morrison to sell her house and invest the money in his business. Joe says he will pay her good interest, but Mrs. Morrison does not want to sell her house. Nevertheless, when Mrs. Morrison visits, he asks her many questions about the Welcome House.

Mrs. Delia Morrison

Mrs. Delia Morrison is a strong, independent woman who uses her many social and management skills to achieve financial self-sufficiency—by forming a local women's club. In the beginning of the story, Mrs. Morrison, the daughter of a senator and the widow of a minister, is faced with a dilemma. She is having a hard time paying off the mortgage on her house, which is due in two years. Mrs. Morrison loves her house, which was built by Senator Welcome, her father. However, Mrs. Morrison does not want to take in boarders at the Welcome House, something that she has done in the past to support her family. Both of her children, Andrew and Jean, encourage her to come and live with their respective families, but Mrs. Morrison tries each home for a week and is not comfortable at either one. Nor does she relish her third option, to marry Mr. Peter Butts—a friend who holds the mortgage on the Welcome House—since Mrs. Morrison still loves her deceased husband. The mortgage is due in two years, on Thanksgiving, and Mr. Butts is hoping that Mrs. Morrison will marry him in a desperate attempt to avoid having to sell the Welcome House. Although her family and Mr. Butts think that Mrs. Morrison will eventually have to choose to live with one of them, she refuses to give up hope that she can keep her house without sacrificing her independence or integrity.

In an effort to explore her options, Mrs. Morrison inventories all of her assets in the Welcome House and realizes that she could turn the house into a hotel or a girls' boarding school. She dismisses these ideas as financial liabilities and ultimately seizes on the idea of using the Welcome House as the site for a women's club. Using one of her girlhood connections, Mrs. Morrison invites Mrs. Isabelle Carter Blake—a noted social activist, mother, and author—to speak to all of the women who live in and around Haddleton. Mrs. Blake encourages the Haddleton women to form a club at the Welcome House, and it becomes wildly successful under Mrs. Morrison's skilful management. By the third Thanksgiving, Mrs. Morrison has made enough profit to pay off the loan from Mr. Butts and even has enough left over to bring her children and their families to the Welcome House for Thanksgiving.

Sally

Sally is Mrs. Morrison's longtime housekeeper. She is a black woman who collects the weekly membership dues from the women in the Haddleton Rest and Improvement Club.

Delia Welcome

See Mrs. Delia Morrison

Themes

Self-Sufficiency

Mrs. Morrison's goal in the story is to reach self-sufficiency so that she can keep her beloved house without having to marry Mr. Butts. For a widowed woman with little money in the early twentieth century, this was a difficult task. Men had a better chance for economic survival, even if they started out poor like Mr. Butts. In addition, most men assumed that a woman, especially a fifty-yearold woman like Mrs. Morrison, would have a hard time surviving on her own. Says Mr. Butts, "But you can't, I tell you. I'd like to know what a woman of your age can do with a house like this—and no money?" Mrs. Morrison's situation is complicated by the fact that she has to pay off a small mortgage on her house. Although the two thousand dollars that she owes to Mr. Butts is not a large sum for a mortgage, Mr. Butts notes the prevailing attitude at the time, saying that it "is considerable money for a single woman to raise in two years—*and* interest." Despite this opposition, which Mrs. Morrison also experiences from other men like her son-in-law, Joe, she is able to make "all expenses . . . her interest . . . a little extra cash, clearly her own, all over and above" the two thousand dollars she owes. By paying off the loan and having money left over, Mrs. Morrison is now debt-free and self-sufficient and so can choose to do whatever she wishes from this point on. However, Mr. Butts still refuses to believe that Mrs. Morrison did it on her own and says, "I believe some of these great friends of yours have lent it to you."

The Expected Roles of Women

During the early twentieth century, most women were expected to get married and raise children, as Mrs. Morrison did. However, if a woman became a widow and did not have enough money to support herself, she was generally expected to depend upon someone else. In the story, Mrs. Morrison's options for whom to depend upon are representative of the few options most women had. She can marry Mr. Butts or live with one of her children. Above all, Mrs. Morrison does not want to remarry. Mr. Butts, however, does not care about Mrs. Morrison's feelings and says to her in regard to the desire to marry: "You've made that clear. You don't, but I do. You've had your way and married the minister. He was a good man, but he's dead. Now you might as well marry me." Men's needs were often put ahead of women's needs, and in this case Mr. Butts is saying that he is a man, he wants to marry her, and he intends to keep pushing her to accept his proposal, despite her protests. Mrs. Morrison refuses to marry Mr. Butts, however, because she still loves her husband. As she notes to herself, "Some day she meant to see him again—God willing—and she did not wish to have to tell him that at fifty she had been driven into marrying Peter Butts."

If she does not marry Mr. Butts, her only other option, at first, appears to be living with one of her children. She gives each of her children's respective homes a one-week trial run, but is not comfortable at either place. With Andrew and his wife, Annie, Mrs.

Morrison is treated like a relic. Andrew and Annie cannot see Mrs. Morrison as anything but old, so when she stays with them and is "set down among the old ladies and gentlemen—she had never realized so keenly that she was no longer young." At Jean's house, Mrs. Morrison is not coddled; she is put to work. Jean expects that her mother will pitch in and take some of the burden off Jean. As a result, Jean is very dependent upon her mother: "By the hour she babbled of their cares and hopes, while Mrs. Morrison, tall and elegant, in her well-kept old black silk, sat holding the baby or trying to hold the twins."

In addition to the roles women were expected to play—wife, mother, old person, babysitter—there were roles that women were expected not to have. Chief among these was businesswoman. This does not stop Mrs. Morrison from trying, however, and when she realizes that she does not like the idea of marrying Mr. Butts or living with her children, she puts her brain to the task of creating a business. "Two years were before her in which she must find some way to keep herself and Sally, and to pay two thousand dollars and the interest to Peter Butts." Most people expect that she will fail in her undertakings, but she surprises them all by starting and running a very successful women's club: "The financial basis of the undertaking was very simple, but it would never have worked so well under less skilful management." Still, some people, most notably Mr. Butts, are not used to the idea of a woman running her own financial affairs. When Mrs. Morrison hands Mr. Butts the check to pay off her loan, he is shocked: "'I didn't know you had a bank account,' he protested, somewhat dubiously."

Mrs. Morrison is only one of the women in the story who demonstrates to the Haddleton women—and Gilman's readers—that women can surpass the expectations put upon them. Mrs. Blake is known internationally for "her splendid work for children. . . . Yet she was known also to have lovingly and wisely reared six children of her own—and made her husband happy in his home." Mrs. Blake is a well-rounded woman, not confined by society's expectations of her. As a result, she is able to fulfill some of the traditional roles of women—wife and mother—while still making a name for herself through her social activism.

The Power of Orgnization

One of the key messages that Gilman gets across in the story is that, on their own, women cannot effect a huge change in society, but there is strength in numbers. When Mrs. Blake speaks to the various churches in Haddleton, she talks about "the women's club houses, going up in city after city, where many associations meet and help one another." Mrs. Blake fires up the crowds by telling them that they will have control over the club, for a small price: "All you have to do is organize, pay some small regular due, and provide yourselves with what you want." The women are excited to form their own club, especially since the fee seems so small: "Five dollars a year these country women could not have faced, but ten cents a week was possible to the poorest." Five dollars a year is roughly ten cents per week, but since the women only have to pay a small portion of it each week, they do not even think about the money.

However, while the fee "was very little money, taken separately . . . it added up with silent speed." This is the power of organization. One person or one small payment on its own cannot create much change. However, when the women band together, they are able to help Mrs. Morrison pay back her loan and retain her self-sufficiency. In the process, the Haddleton women collectively strike a victory for feminism, since they will get to keep their club and Mrs. Morrison will keep her independence—a good thing for all women. The countess notes the positive power of women's organization, which was going on in many places at the beginning of the twentieth century. The countess addresses the women of Haddleton, saying that she expects if she returns to the town, "it would have joined the great sisterhood of women, whose hands were touching around the world for the common good."

Style

Setting

"Three Thanksgivings" takes place mainly at the Welcome House, which quickly becomes the focal point of the story. Mrs. Morrison loves her home, a fact that is made clear at the beginning of the story: "Even after living with her father at Washington and abroad, after visiting hall, castle and palace, she still found the Welcome House beautiful and impressive." It is because of the house that Mrs. Morrison is forced to look at her options. She does not have enough money to pay the mortgage, and at first it looks as if she will not be able to do anything to raise enough money. As a result, she feels that she may have to choose between selling her house or marrying Mr. Butts. However, as she makes clear to her persistent suitor, "I should prefer to keep the house without you, Mr. Butts." This becomes the goal that motivates Mrs. Morrison throughout the story.

Characterization

Mrs. Morrison is well suited for this challenge, because Gilman gives her a number of winning characteristics. When the reader first meets Mrs. Morrison, she is described as "a tall woman, commanding of aspect, yet of a winningly attractive manner, erect and light-footed, still imposingly handsome." Physically, she is a very striking presence, something that Gilman emphasizes elsewhere in the story, by talking about Mrs. Morrison's "full graceful height" and describing her as "tall and elegant." However, Mrs. Morrison's positive characteristics do not end with her looks. She is also very refined and gracious, and as a result she has built up a great reputation with the women of Haddleton. The narrator remarks that Mrs. Morrison "had no enemies, but no one had ever blamed her for her unlimited friendliness." Mrs. Morrison's regal manner is illustrated repeatedly throughout the story. For example, when she gets the brainstorm to start the women's club, the narrator describes it as follows: "Suddenly she stopped short in the middle of the great high-ceiled room, and drew her head up proudly like a victorious queen." The women of Haddleton also notice Mrs. Morrison's queenly grace: "Some were moved to note that Mrs. Morrison looked the easy peer of these eminent ladies, and treated the foreign nobility precisely as she did her other friends." This graciousness and elegance helps to sell the Haddleton women on the idea of the club.

Once the club has been established, Mrs. Morrison proves herself again with her good management skills. In the past, these skills have allowed her to be successful in business, even when it meant enduring unpleasant situations. For example, Mrs. Morrison has never liked taking in boarders, something she was forced to do to provide for her children when they lived with her. However, "her youthful experience in diplomatic circles, and the years of practical management in church affairs, enabled her

to bear it with patience and success." When she manages the women's club, these skills are put to good use. Says the narrator, "There was a good deal of work, a good deal of care, and room for the whole supply of Mrs. Morrison's diplomatic talent and experience."

Description

Throughout the story, Gilman describes certain sections in more detail than in others. These highly detailed sections are generally either negative sections about what Mrs. Morrison's life will be like if she does not pay off the loan or positive sections about Mrs. Morrison's efforts to come up with the loan money. Examples of the first category occur when Mrs. Morrison goes to visit her children on successive Thanksgivings. Gilman's description of the "affectionately offered" guest room in Andrew's house is extensive. Gilman describes the exact size dimensions and then goes on to explain the bleak views from each of the room's two windows, "one looking at some pale gray clapboards within reach of a broom, the other giving a view of several small fenced yards occupied by cats, clothes and children." Following this, Gilman gives a description of a certain flower that Mrs. Morrison does not like, the unwanted hot-water bag that Annie forces on Mrs. Morrison each night, and the tiny dining room. All in all, the detailed description serves as an effective counterpart, showing the readers the type of misery that Mrs. Morrison will have to live in if she loses her beloved house. This type of description is repeated when Mrs. Morrison stays with Jean and Joe, except this time the misery takes the form of a house "full of babies" who ruin her "well-kept old black silk" by the end of her one-week stay. Gilman uses these and other descriptions to show the reader the potential bleak futures that could await Mrs. Morrison. In turn, these nightmare scenarios help to give her character the motivation to shape her own future.

By contrast, the overly descriptive sections that depict Mrs. Morrison's efforts to pay off the loan are very positive. For example, when she first attacks the problem, Mrs. Morrison explores her assets in full: "She went over the place from garret to cellar, from front gate to backyard fence." Gilman could have left the description of this brief, with perhaps a paragraph about the types of items that Mrs. Morrison finds. Instead, Gilman writes several paragraphs of description, recording in detail, as Mrs. Morrison does, aspects of the garden and the amounts and condition of furniture, linens, china, and other assets. As she does so, the reader can start to sense that something positive will come from all of this stock, even if the reader does not know exactly what that is. These positive sections also demonstrate Mrs. Morrison's capability for thinking as a businesswoman. This talent is demonstrated, in part by additional descriptions, later on in the story, when Gilman displays in detail how Mrs. Morrison is successful in managing her club.

Historical Context

First-Wave Feminism

Although women had been fighting for equal rights in various areas since the late eighteenth century, around the time that Mary Wollstonecraft wrote her seminal *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), most historians consider modern feminism to fall into two time periods. The first period, known as first-wave feminism, consists of the efforts of women—primarily in Europe and the United States—in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to gain more rights, mainly legal rights such as voting, or suffrage. Second-wave feminism, a movement that reached its height in the 1960s and 1970s, had a larger focus and strove for equality between the sexes in every category. Second-wave feminism is commonly known as the women's movement.

During the first-wave feminism period, in the first decade of the twentieth century when Gilman wrote "Three Thanksgivings," women's rights were a hot issue. Says J. M. Roberts, in his *Twentieth Century: The History of the World, 1901 to 2000:* "Virtually nowhere could women be said to enjoy as much freedom or so high a legal status as men." This situation differed little from the situation that women had faced for much of recorded history. However, following the American Civil War, when blacks—but not women—were given the right to vote, more women began to organize and demand the right to vote, and women's issues became a hot topic. Says Roberts, "By 1901, the words 'feminism' and 'feminist' had come (from France) to be well-established in English in association with the promotion of women's rights."

Women's Suffrage

By far, the biggest issue that women fought for in the beginning of the twentieth century was suffrage. The issue was complicated by the fact that there were two major women's suffrage organizations, with opposing viewpoints, which fought each other. The National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), which was founded in 1869, was the more radical of the two, as it did not accept male members, and it denounced the Fifteenth Amendment for not including women. Formed later that same year, the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) was a more conservative organization, and it praised the Fifteenth Amendment as a necessary first step. The organization, which was founded by both men and women, also accepted men as members. In 1890, these two organizations joined forces to become the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).

By the turn of the century, several American states and territories in the West had given women the right to vote. Although women's suffrage is not one of the major issues in "Three Thanksgivings," Mrs. Morrison does mention it briefly to Mr. Butts when discussing how much higher the interest is in Colorado: "Do you know the average interest they charge in Colorado? The women vote there, you know." However, in the

eastern United States, there was a greater battle for women to win the right to vote, and women spoke out on many occasions. The formal, opening rally of the American suffragettes took place in 1907 in New York City, when a group of women spoke to a group of hundreds, mainly men, many of whom supported their suffrage efforts.

Women in the Workforce

Women in the Workforce While suffrage was the main issue during firstwave feminism, some women wanted to pursue equality in other areas. Says Paul Johnson, in his book, *A History of the American People:* "They had to secure, for instance, equality of pay and equality of opportunity in job selection and promotion, and over a whole range of other matters." The situation for American women in the workforce in the last two decades of the nineteenth century was bleak. The three fields commonly open to most women were domestic service, nursing, and teaching. This situation began to change somewhat by the turn of the century. Says Johnson, "By 1890 there were 4 million employed women, rising to 5.1 million in 1900 and 7.8 million in 1910, and by this date educational facilities for women were available in all the arts and sciences." Despite these advances, however, inequalities still existed between men and women in the workforce.

Fighting Misconceptions

Part of the problem that women faced in their struggle for equality was the misconceptions that society had about women's abilities. In 1871, Charles Darwin had published *The Descent of Man,* in which he claimed that men were more evolved than women. Gilman herself was one of the most outspoken about the issue of male superiority. In her controversial *Women and Economics* (1898), her best-known nonfiction work, she posed the theory that women are the losers in social evolution, which favors males. Gilman stated that women, like Mrs. Morrison in "Three Thanksgivings," are just as capable as men but that due to their cultural suppression, they are at an economic disadvantage to men in human society. As a result, women are usually forced to depend on men. Says Gilman, "We are the only animal species in which the female depends on the male for food, the only animal species in which the sex-relation is also an economic relation." However, others continued to disseminate information that suggested women were inferior to men. In 1906, Dr. Dudley Sargent, the physical director at Harvard University, focused on the physical weakness of women, saying that women should not play any contact sports and should instead focus on more graceful, lady-like forms of athletics. In addition, in 1907, W. I. Thomas, a University of Chicago professor, published *Sex and Society,* a book that, among other assertions, stated that women were intellectual savages.

Critical Overview

Gilman's story "Three Thanksgivings" has received very little critical attention. It was first published in 1909 in Gilman's journal, Forerunner, which may have been part of the problem. Gilman had attracted the attention of critics before. In her entry on Gilman for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* Robin Miskolcze notes that Gilman's first published poem, "Similar Cases," received "a letter of praise from William Dean Howells, a respected writer and editor of the *Atlantic Monthly."* However, though Gilman's earlier writings attracted critics, *Forerunner* was largely ignored by reviewers. As Gary Scharnhorst notes in his 1985 book, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman,* "Unfortunately, few critics, not even Howells—though Gilman twice sent him bound volumes—deigned to notice the magazine."

Part of this neglect was due to some early critics' assertion that most of the writings in Forerunner were too heavy-handed in their feminist approach. In his 1991 *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Nonfiction Reader,* editor Larry Ceplair notes of Gilman's magazine that "Charlotte's commentaries ranged over a wide range of topics, but the central theme never varied." Ceplair further says that this "sameness of tone" was most prevalent when Gilman "used a sermonizing form, as she increasingly did."

Following Gilman's death in 1935, scholarship concerning the writer dried up. In her introduction in 1992's *Herland and Selected Stories by Charlotte Perkins Gilman,* editor Barbara H. Solomon notes this phenomenon: "Descriptions of her life and contributions simply disappeared." Solomon cites an example from 1962, *The Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature,* which includes three other Gilmans, but not Charlotte. However, as Solomon explains, in the mid-1960s "a burgeoning interest in feminist issues led historians, social critics, teachers, and students to search for the best sources about the conditions of women." Gilman's works began to be reprinted, including a reprint of all seven years of *Forerunner,* in 1968.

Even after the *Forerunner* stories resurfaced, however, they were not given as much critical attention as Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1899), her first published work of fiction. Scharnhorst divides the *Forerunner* stories into two categories: "fantasies with a feminist message" and "illustrations of women's economic independence." While Scharnhorst says that the former are usually "whimsical," he considers the latter to be "contrived and repetitive" and says that they are "more heavyhanded, formulaic, and predictable than her feminist fantasies." "Three Thanksgivings" falls into this second of Scharnhorst's categories, and, based on the lack of critical attention given to the story, it would appear that many critics agree with his negative assessment. For example, in a book devoted entirely to Gilman's short stories, 1997's *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Study of the Short Fiction,* Denise D. Knight offers only a small comment on the story, saying that it underscores "the theme of economic independence," like several of Gilman's stories.

One of the most in-depth studies of the story was by Solomon, in her introduction to *Herland and Selected Stories by Charlotte Perkins Gilman.* Solomon notes that Mrs.

Morrison is representative of many of the women characters that Gilman wrote about in her stories: "Sensible and intelligent, she is at an economic disadvantage as a woman in a society with low expectations for women." Solomon notes additional aspects of "Three Thanksgivings" that are representative of Gilman's other works. For example, "Like Delia Morrison, numerous Gilman heroines find that in addressing their own desire to do meaningful work, they can aid other women, bringing about significant and muchneeded social change." One of the other recurring topics that Solomon notes is "the evaluation of possible or existing marriages from the perspective of whether they are desirable for the woman." Finally, Solomon notes that the positive conclusion of "Three Thanksgivings," like the ending of many Gilman stories, is "neither a forced nor a tacked-on ending. It develops from the characters' traits and the events and has an emotional as well as a logical rightness."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette explores Gilman's use of characterization to underscore her feminist message in "Three Thanksgivings."

It is no surprise that Gilman's works resurfaced in the 1960s and 1970s when the women's movement began. As Barbara H. Solomon notes in her 1992 introduction to *Herland and Selected Stories by Charlotte Perkins Gilman,* "a burgeoning interest in feminist issues led historians, social critics, teachers, and students to search for the best sources about the conditions of women. And their search inevitably led to Charlotte Perkins Gilman." The majority of Gilman's works, both fiction and nonfiction, address women's issues in some way. For example, although she claimed in her autobiography that the real purpose of her novella, *The Yellow Wallpaper,* "was to reach Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, and convince him of the error of his ways"—as a response to the disastrous rest-cure treatment he prescribed for her—the work has had a much broader effect. Many, like Carol Fairley Kessler in her entry on Gilman for *Modern American Women Writers,* have called it Gilman's "masterpiece" and hold it up as a key work of feminism for its social message—which encouraged women to rebel against the male-dominated society and its rules. Likewise, Gilman's short story "Three Thanksgivings" uses specific characterization techniques to underscore her message: women must not compromise their feminine values and morals in the process of becoming economically self-sufficient like men.

In the story, Mrs. Morrison's character is set up as the moral center of the tale. She is a woman of integrity, who is always true to her values. She also has many other equally desirable qualities. She is willing to make sacrifices for others, even when it means discomfort or potential ruin for herself. For example, in years past, after her husband died, she took on boarders to raise enough money to support her family: "This had been the one possible and necessary thing while the children were there, though it was a business she hated." Another key example of Mrs. Morrison's thoughtfulness is demonstrated when she is considering her assets to determine how she can survive and pay off her loan to Mr. Butts. She initially considers growing crops in her garden. Says Mrs. Morrison, "This garden . . . with the hens, will feed us two women and sell enough to pay Sally." The economical choice would be to fire Sally and clean the house herself, since Mrs. Morrison is capable of doing so. However, she watches out for Sally, who is older and who might have difficulty finding work elsewhere in town because of her age. In fact, Sally might even be willing to work for her board instead of working for payment, but Mrs. Morrison does not even think about taking advantage of Sally in this way.

In addition, Mrs. Morrison has a strong faith that good will prevail. Even after an unpleasant visit from Mr. Butts in which he reminds her that the mortgage is due in two years, Mrs. Morrison is able to watch Mr. Butts "go with a keen light in her fine eyes, a more definite line to that steady, pleasant smile." She has strong convictions and knows

that she will find some way to pay the mortgage and thus avoid having to compromise her integrity by marrying Mr. Butts.

Finally, Mrs. Morrison is happiest when she is able to do good work, not just make money. She enjoyed working with people in her husband's church, even though "she was not strong on doctrine." And when she considers her options for businesses to form, she initially seizes on the idea of a girls' school: "A boarding school! There was money to be made at that, and fine work done."

Taken alone, Mrs. Morrison's commitment to integrity and her moral characteristics are impressive. However, her character becomes even more powerful when compared with the weak men in the story. The three males—Andrew, Joe, and Mr. Butts—all have serious character flaws that cause them to be foils to Mrs. Morrison. A foil is a character that contrasts strongly with another character, in order to make the first character seem more prominent in a specific way. In this case, all of the male characters are deliberately given negative or inadequate characteristics to make Mrs. Morrison appear stronger. The foils get increasingly more negative—and therefore more effective—as the story progresses. When Mrs. Morrison reads the letter from Andrew, it is immediately apparent that Andrew is overprotective of his mother, which is not inherently a bad quality. However, he is also narrowminded, thinking that she cannot take care of herself. In his letter Andrew writes, "It is not right that you should live alone there. Sally is old and liable to accident. I am anxious about you. Come on for Thanksgiving—and come to stay."

Mrs. Morrison notes to herself that Andrew's statement is false, because Sally is a woman "of changeless aspect and incessant activity," meaning that, although Sally may be advanced in years, she is still very youthful and energetic. However, Andrew is unable to look past his own impressions and so continues to view both Mrs. Morrison and Sally as old and feeble. Also, if one examines Andrew's letter closely, it appears that Andrew's intentions are not so charitable. Though he is certainly concerned about his mother's welfare, he is also feeling inadequate. At the beginning of his letter, he writes: "You belong with me. . . . It is not right that Jean's husband should support my mother. I can do it easily now." Andrew feels insecure about the fact that Joe has been helping to support Mrs. Morrison and wants to prove to himself, and possibly others, that he is capable of taking care of his own mother.

Though Andrew is narrow-minded, at least he is selfless when it comes to selling Mrs. Morrison's house. Andrew encourages his mother to sell the house but says that he will invest it for her and that she will keep all of the profits. The same is not true for Jean's husband, Joe. He wants Mrs. Morrison to sell her house and put the money into his business, although he offers to pay her interest on the investment. When she comes to stay with Jean and Joe, he tries to press Mrs. Morrison into selling her house by telling her "how much he needed capital, urging her to come and stay with them; it was such a help to Jeannie; asking questions about the house."

The biggest foil in the story is Mr. Butts, because he wants to own Mrs. Morrison and her house, giving her nothing in return. He is obviously attracted to her but is more

attracted to the domestic skills she can offer him. Says Mr. Butts, "You aren't so young as you were, to be sure; I'm not, either. But you are as good a housekeeper as ever—better—you've had more experience." In addition to his blatant disregard for Mrs. Morrison's feelings, Mr. Butts has no dignity. When Mrs. Morrison tells him that she cannot remarry, he tells her, "It wouldn't look well if you did—at any rate, if you showed it." Mr. Butts does not want to marry Mrs. Morrison out of love. She is an object to him and one that he is willing to hide from society, as long as he gets his housekeeper. Because Mr. Butts is obviously lacking in dignity, it makes Mrs. Morrison's displays of dignity that much more effective. In fact, throughout the story, Mrs. Morrison is so dignified that even when she is dining alone with Sally, she goes to the table "with as much dignity as if twenty titled guests were before her."

All three men have motives for wanting Mrs. Morrison to give up her independence, and they are willing to sacrifice her happiness to get what they want. In the end, however, all three men fail in their goals to have Mrs. Morrison, her house, or her money. Mrs. Morrison, on the other hand, does not put anybody in a bad situation when pursuing her economic self-sufficiency. As a result, she is rewarded. In some cases, the rewards stem from her past good acts. For example, in the past she has gone out of her way to help the Haddleton farm-women. When her husband was alive, it was one of Mrs. Morrison's joys "to bring together these women—to teach and entertain them." This fact, coupled with the fact that "the whole town knew and admired" Mrs. Morrison, has given her a solid reputation in the community. As a result, Mrs. Morrison's announcement attracts "hundreds upon hundreds" of women, all of whom eventually join Mrs. Morrison's club.

Even in the management of the club, Mrs. Morrison's past good deeds come back to help her: "The town was full of Mrs. Morrison's ex-Sundayschool boys, who furnished her with the best they had—at cost." In other words, Mrs. Morrison's good reputation has extended to the young boys that she mentored in her husband's church. Now that the boys have grown up and are in a position to repay Mrs. Morrison's kindness, they do so willingly.

Though she certainly reaps rewards for her past good works in the community, the club would not be as much of a success as it is if Mrs. Morrison did not continue to demonstrate her good characteristics. First and foremost, unlike the men in the story, Mrs. Morrison is open-minded. Instead of excluding men, like men often excluded women, she rents out rooms in the Welcome House to an increasing number of people, male and female:

Circle within circle, and group within group, she set small classes and departments at work, having a boys' club by and by in the big room over the woodshed, girls' clubs, reading clubs, study clubs, little meetings of every sort that were not held in churches, and some that were—previously.

Of course, if Mrs. Morrison were like Joe, concerning herself only with money, she could just take the admission fees and keep most of the profits. However, she keeps only a portion of the money, using the rest to invest back into the club, stocking "the library with

many magazines for fifty dollars a year," feeding "her multitude with the plain viands agreed upon," and providing many other "collateral entertainments." In other words, she goes the extra mile to make sure that anybody who pays her dime admission fee has a comfortable and fulfilling experience. As a result, the club gets a great reputation, the membership grows, and Mrs. Morrison achieves her ultimate goal of financial self-sufficiency. However, her reward is even sweeter, because she achieves it by helping others—in this case, the Haddleton women. As Solomon notes, this is a common theme in many of Gilman's works: "Like Delia Morrison, numerous Gilman heroines find that in addressing their own desire to do meaningful work, they can aid other women, bringing about significant and much-needed social change."

In the end, the strong moral characterization of Mrs. Morrison, the portrayal of weakness in the three men in the story, and the successful completion of Mrs. Morrison's goal through honest, charitable work all underscore the point of the story. Gilman's moral message is clear to her turn-of-thecentury audience: if women want to get ahead in a man's world, they will have the most success if they maintain their integrity and charity and do not adopt self-serving attitudes. In the race for equality with men, women should not be so foolish as to think they must become like men to achieve their goals.

Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on "Three Thanksgivings," in *Short Stories for Students,* Gale, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

Mayhew is a freelance writer. In this essay, Mayhew examines the way Gilman slowly draws the reader into her short story.

In the short story "Three Thanksgivings," Gilman carefully sets up the story so that the reader is slowly introduced to the idea that a woman can thrive without the standard husband-wife-child model of domestic bliss. At the time this story was written, Gilman's ideas on what woman's role in the world should be were radical. If she had used a less subtle approach in writing her story, she might have alienated her contemporary readers immediately. Instead, Gilman very cleverly enlists the reader's sympathy and draws the reader in slowly to her way of thinking. Rather than focusing on lengthy passages introducing each character, she painstakingly exposes her characters to the reader through their actions and words.

The main character, Mrs. Delia Morrison, is a widow. To make ends meet after her husband dies, she runs a boarding-house. Though she detests the intrusion and constant care boarders require, she never lets it show. Mrs. Morrison lives by herself and continues to take in boarders sporadically after her children have grown and started their own lives. When finances become too tight, she agrees to mortgage her beloved house to one Mr. Butts, a friend who wishes to marry her. She pays him interest on a yearly basis. The story opens just before Thanksgiving, two years before the $2,000 mortgage will come due.

What is shown at the beginning of the story gives the reader a limited, and conventional, impression of the characters. Running a boardinghouse was one of the few respectable options open to women at that time. The plot appears to be setting up the classic you-must-pay-the-rent-I-can't-paytherent scenario, but this theme is turned on its head when it is Mrs. Morrison who saves herself from the story's mild villain, Mr. Butts. She does this by starting a successful small business.

At the beginning of the story, Mrs. Morrison reads two letters from her children. Both children write asking her to come visit for Thanksgiving and to consider moving in with each of them respectively. Both children insist that their spouses would love to have Mrs. Morrison live with them. And both offer her her own small room to live in. Both children have suggestions on what to do with the money from the rental or sale of her large, empty house—her son would invest it and she could have the income from the investments, and her son-inlaw would like to use it for capital for his business (he would pay interest, of course).

Her son Andrew writes that "it is not right that you should live alone there." He also says "it is not right" that his sister's husband should support Mrs. Morrison. He suggests that, instead, she come to live with him and his bride. Her daughter, Jean, on the other hand, suggests that her mother should come live with them because she could be "pretty comfortable" there, and her presence would "be such a comfort to me, and such a help

with the babies." Both children wish their mother would do the accepted thing for a widow of her advanced years—either re-marry or move in with one of her children.

The first Thanksgiving is spent with her son, Andrew, and his wife, Annie, in their small parsonage. It is clear to Mrs. Morrison that she would mostly be in the way. They treat her with a great deal of deference on account of her age, which she hardly pays notice to at home. She feels smothered by the tiny house and is relieved to go home after a week.

Upon arriving home, she sets her "clear and daring mind" to work on the problem of what she can do with the house and all its contents to earn the money to pay off the mortgage interest and its principal in the two years she has left. Selling items would not raise enough ready cash, though there are many items in the house and its large attic. Mr. Butts says, "I'd like to know what a woman of your age can do with a house like this—and no money?" Mrs. Morrison sets out to figure out what she can do to earn money; she is sure there must be some way she can stay in the house and avoid marrying Mr. Butts.

She starts by taking a full inventory of the house and all its contents—from front to back, side to side, inside and out. This inventory is several pages into the story, and the reader is now firmly on Mrs. Morrison's side. Gilman has waited this long to show readers that Mrs. Morrison, though a woman and under such duress, is capable of clear thought and careful planning. Mrs. Morrison considers several possible options—continuing to take in boarders, turning her home into a hotel or a school for girls—and rejects each of these ideas. She then lights upon the idea of using her house as the meeting place for a women's club. She enlists the help of two old friends, who are both strong reformminded women in their own right.

Mrs. Morrison invites her two friends, Mrs. Isabelle Carter Blake, of Chicago, and an Italian Countess, to visit and give a lecture at her house for the many women who live in the town and surrounding area. Between the persuasive efforts of Mrs. Morrison and her friends, they sell the idea of a women's club to the hundreds of local women who come to attend this lecture. The women's club will provide light refreshments and open rooms for meeting or resting once a week for a nominal fee. This club is a success almost immediately and the money starts rolling in. Thus passes an extremely busy year for Mrs. Morrison.

The second Thanksgiving finds Mrs. Morrison visiting her daughter, Jean, and her husband, Joe. They have three young children who keep their mother constantly looking out for them and leave her little time to socialize or even to leave the house. The room Mrs. Morrison is given is again very small, and she longs for her own house. She is glad to see the week end. She returns home to immerse herself in her fledgling business. By now, it does not seem odd that Mrs. Morrison is running the women's club, nor does it seem odd that she wishes to stay in her own house. The reader has seen the other options and they are clearly inferior to Mrs. Morrison staying in her own home.

To the reader, it is at first unclear why Delia Morrison will "not, at any price, marry Peter Butts." At the beginning of the story, Mr. Butts does not seem to be that bad, really. Gilman describes him thus:

Mr. Peter Butts . . . had been a poor boy when she was a rich girl; and it gratified him much to realize—and to call upon her to realize—that their positions had changed. He meant no unkindness, his pride was honest and unveiled. Tact he had none.

At the beginning, Mr. Butts appears to be a benevolent, if not particularly attractive, figure who has been in love with Delia Morrison for many years and who wishes to help her. He sees their potential marriage as mutually beneficial—he will get her house and her status, and she will regain her purpose in life. Though Mrs. Morrison repeatedly refuses to marry Mr. Butts, he continues to ask, apparently believing that it is only a matter of time before she realizes that this is the way things should be. When she says, "I do not wish to marry again, Mr. Butts; neither you nor anyone," he responds: "Very proper, very proper, Delia. . . . It wouldn't look well if you did—at any rate, if you showed it. But why shouldn't you?"

Indeed, why should she not marry again though she does not wish it? Surely it is improper for a woman to live alone in a large house, even though that is where she has always lived. What could she possibly do with herself? Surely being alone, with no one to care for, would not make her happy. At least, not according to the feminine ideal at the time the story was written. But Mrs. Morrison is not a normal nineteenth-century heroine. She has her own ideas about how she should spend the rest of her life.

Barbara H. Solomon, writing in the Introduction to *Herland and Selected Short Stories of Charlotte Perkins Gilman,* states that Gilman

was reared in a world which considered her being female as the foremost fact about her. Thus, she was raised to take her place in the domestic sphere in which it was assumed all normal women would find happiness and fulfillment. . . . she attempted to live in the sphere assigned to women, with the goals which were described in her era as 'the cult of true womanhood.'

Gilman has, in Mrs. Delia Morrison, shown readers a heroine who smilingly disproves many commonly-held nineteenth-century beliefs about women. Gilman leads the reader so slowly to this point that the reader is hoping for the success of Mrs. Morrison's endeavors without even realizing just how far from the norm those endeavors are. Mrs. Morrison clearly states her desire to continue to live, unmarried, in the house she loves. Mrs. Morrison's opinion is dismissed as unimportant by her children and by Mr. Butts. It is simply too unbelievable in that day and age. The nineteenthcentury notion of true womanhood was one that limited woman's path to happiness to pursuits inside the home. Without a family to care for, Mrs. Morrison is useless indeed—and should be unhappy. That is not, however, the case. In fact, as Gilman writes, "Mrs. Morrison was alone, and while living in the Welcome House she was never unhappy."

Gilman sets up Mrs. Delia Morrison as a quiet and gracious rebel. Mrs. Morrison's usual response to disagreement is to smile in some way, state her case clearly, and then continue on her chosen path. Gilman uses Mrs. Morrison's actions and words to impress upon the reader how important living in her home is to her. Mrs. Morrison is unmoved by the pressure brought to bear from her children and Mr. Butts to change her life to suit them better. When Mr. Butts leaves after the first conversation in the story, "Mrs. Morrison saw him go with a keen light in her fine eyes, a more definite line to that steady, pleasant smile." This is just a hint of her determination to carve out a new life for herself that is free from her indebtedness to him.

Mr. Butts' visit after the second Thanksgiving is a bit different from the first. Mr. Butts is somewhat astonished that Mrs. Morrison has earned enough to pay the interest. He says, "'How on earth'd you get it, Delia?' he demanded. 'Screwed it out o' those club-women?'" This little glimpse into the workings of Mr. Butts' brain does him no favors in the reader's eyes. By the third visit, it is clear that Mr. Butts wants Mrs. Morrison and her house more as a social prize to increase his standing in the community than for any caring for her or respect for her numerous capabilities. He says, "'I'd like to know how you got this money. You *can't'* a' skinned it out o' that club of yours.'" It is simply impossible for him to believe that she has earned enough money to pay back the $2,000 mortgage, with interest, in 10-cent increments over two years' time. Mr. Butts is incapable of believing a woman capable of that kind of meticulous planning and foresight. He is hardly unusual for his era.

Indeed, the average nineteenth-century reader of "Three Thanksgivings" would normally agree and identify with Mr. Butts. It is Gilman's careful treatment of the subject matter as a story, that draws the reader into sympathetic agreement with her. The idea of Mrs. Morrison keeping her house and her independence becomes the most obvious solution. In this way, Gilman turns the usual nineteenth century belief that women are less capable than men on its head very slowly so that it draws the reader into a sort of complicity with the author. It is subtle enough that the reader does not notice the shift in perception.

The story ends at the third Thanksgiving, when Mrs. Morrison gathers her family to her and tells them of her future plans: to stay where she is and continue to run the women's club out of her home. By the time the story draws to its close, it seems only logical that Mrs. Morrison should continue to live her life on her own terms, which is a radical notion indeed for the average nineteenth-century woman.

Source: Charlotte Mayhew, Critical Essay on "Three Thanksgivings," in *Short Stories for Students,* Gale, 2003.

Topics for Further Study

Research the early 1900s, and find one woman who became a successful entrepreneur in this time period. Compare this person's real-life story with the life of Mrs. Morrison, focusing on the challenges that both women faced in becoming self-sufficient.

A longtime topic of debate is the inequality of pay between men and women for comparable work. Research the history of this debate; then explore the current situation. Plot out a timeline that depicts the major events in this debate, and write a one-page summary that describes how and where this issue started and where it stands today.

In the story, Mrs. Morrison is a widow who refuses to remarry, a fact that puts her at an economic disadvantage. Compare Mrs. Morrison's situation to the situation of a modernday widow, and discuss the different obstacles that women from each era have faced. Use economic facts from both the early 1900s and today to back up your assertions.

Research the state of women's organizations today, and compare them to the Rest and Improvement Club that is depicted in the story. Discuss the economic, political, and social factors that have influenced the structure of both the Rest and Improvement Club and modern-day women's organizations.

Review several news articles from the first decade of the 1900s, paying particular attention to any articles that discuss the expected roles of women. Pretend that you are a male reporter in 1900s Haddleton, who learns of the success of Mrs. Morrison's Rest and Improvement Club. Write an article about Mrs. Morrison and her club that is written in the style of an early-1900s article, preserving any attitudes or biases that one might expect to find in an article like this.

Compare and Contrast

1900s: More women join the fight for women's suffrage, or the right to vote. Suffragettes begin to campaign in areas like New York City.

Today: Women have the right to vote, and an increasing number of women hold some of the nation's most prestigious government positions. Sandra Day O'Connor and Ruth Bader Ginsberg occupy two of the nine seats on the United States Supreme Court, while in the 107th Congress, 13 percent of the members of the Senate and roughly 14 percent of the members of the House of Representatives are women. In addition, in 1996, President Bill Clinton appoints Madeleine Albright as the first woman Secretary of State, a nomination that is unanimously approved by the Senate the following year.

1900s: In addition to the fight for voting privileges, some women—including Charlotte Perkins Gilman—speak out about other inequalities between the sexes, particularly the economic disadvantage faced by most women. When women are allowed to work in the same fields as men, they generally earn much less.

Today: Thanks to legislation from the last half of the twentieth century, many inequalities between men and women in the workforce have been eliminated, although in some areas, women still fight for equal pay. As more equality issues are resolved, the new issue for many women becomes the struggle to strike a balance between their careers and their families. For some women, it becomes a choice between the two, since mothers who take time off to raise children often find it hard to reenter the workforce.

1900s: Women are thought of by many as physically inferior to men. This assumption is supported by the prevention of female competition in certain sports. In the 1900 Olympics, women are limited to two events—tennis and golf.

Today: Women compete professionally in basketball and other contact sports, as well as in most of the Olympic categories as their male counterparts. The first female cadets enter into traditionally male military institutes. Movies like G.I. Jane and television shows like *Alias* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* feature tough women who are more than a match for their antagonists, many of whom are tough men.

What Do I Read Next?

Betty Friedan's controversial *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) helped to launch the modern women's movement. The book shatters the myth that post-World War II housewives were happy taking care of their husbands and children. Friedan labeled this misconception the feminine mystique and used her book to reveal the pain and frustration that many women faced when their needs were placed below the needs of their families.

Gilman originally published "Three Thanksgivings" in *Forerunner,* a magazine that she published for seven years, from November 1909 to December 1916. Each issue of *Forerunner* contained a wide range of short fiction, serialized novels, poetry, articles, and other works, all written by Gilman. All seven volumes were reprinted in 1968, and although they are currently out of print, they are still available at some libraries. In addition, the first volume was reprinted in a different edition in 2002 and is widely available.

One of Gilman's best-known novels, *Herland* (1915), describes a witty, feminist utopia. In the idealistic world that Gilman creates, women rule their own country, where they do not need men to reproduce. Three male explorers from the United States find the isolated country, which they name Herland. The men are surprised to find that the women are equal to them and are shocked when the women do not respond to the same types of charms that work on women in the United States.

Many critics consider Gilman's novella *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1899), which is based on events in her own life, to be her finest literary work. The story consists of ten diary entries by Jane, a wife who is under the care of her husband, a physician, for what he thinks is a mild case of depression. While they are staying at a summerhouse, Jane's husband locks her in a third-floor room, thinking that the seclusion will help her get well. As the story progresses, Jane increasingly relates with a trapped woman whom she envisions living inside the room's yellow wallpaper.

In Edith Wharton's *House of Mirth* (1905), Lily Bart is an aristocratic woman with no income who rebels against the conventions of her social class, including refusing to marry a suitor to maintain her economic stability.

In Virginia Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929), the writer argues that, in order for women to achieve the same greatness that male writers have, women need an income and privacy. In addition, Woolf discusses the fact that the idealistic and powerful portrayals of women in fiction have historically differed from the slave-like situations that many women faced in real life.

Further Study

Baker, Jean H., ed., *Votes for Women: The Struggle for Suffrage Revisited,* Viewpoints on American Culture series, Oxford University Press, 2002.

This book includes eleven essays, which collectively give an overview of the American women's suffrage movement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The discussion includes key figures such as Susan B. Anthony and Sojourner Truth and key events such as the 1848 gathering at Seneca Falls, New York. In addition, the book features an introductory essay by Baker that gives the suffrage movement context within other events of the times.

Crittenden, Ann, *The Price of Motherhood: Why the Most Important Job in the World Is Still the Least Valued,* Owl Books, 2002.

In this book, Crittenden, a noted economic journalist, asserts that mothers are penalized for their childbearing role. Whether mothers stay at home, work, are single or married, Crittenden uses studies and financial facts to show that they are all at an economic disadvantage to others in society. However, Crittenden does not just define the problem; she also offers solutions based on working models found in such diverse areas as Sweden and the United States military.

Freedman, Estelle B., *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women,* Ballantine Books, 2002.

In this engaging, narrative history of feminism, Freedman explores a wide range of associated issues, including race, politics, economics, and health, while providing her own critical interpretations of these topics.

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination,* Yale University Press, 2000.

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar originally published this groundbreaking volume of feminist literary criticism in 1979. The book offered revolutionary concepts in literary criticism about women and gave critical studies of the works of major nineteenthcentury women authors, such as Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, and Charlotte Brontë. This latest edition includes a new introduction from the two authors.

Helgesen, Sally, *The Female Advantage: Women's Ways of Leadership,* Currency/Doubleday, 1995.

Helgesen explores the difference between how women's management style differs from their male counterparts. The author says that women—who tend to lead via a relationship web—are better suited for the modern business environment than men—who tend to lead via old-fashioned hierarchies. The book also provides in-depth profiles

of four women executives who became successful as a result of their female qualities of leadership.

Karpinski, Joanne B., ed., *Critical Essays on Charlotte Perkins Gilman,* G. K. Hall & Company, 1992.

This book includes a short biography by Karpinski, reprints of original reviews of Gilman's works, and several essays from modern critics. Collectively, the book offers a biographical and critical overview of Gilman's life and work.

Schneir, Miriam, ed., *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings,* Vintage Books, 1994.

In this book, Schneir compiles an impressive anthology of the writings that helped to define the feminist movement. The volume includes essays, fiction, memoirs, and letters by Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, Emma Goldman, John Stuart Mill, and many other feminist writers. Schneir also provides commentary on the writings.

----, ed., *Feminism in Our Time: The Essential Writings, World War II to the Present,* Vintage Books, 1994.

This book completes the history that Schneir started with *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings.* The anthology focuses on contemporary writings from the second half of the twentieth century and features fifty selections, including many excerpts from longer works. As in her first collection, Schneir provides commentary on the writings.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS 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 SSfS 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

SSfS 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 Short Stories 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 SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS 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 Short Stories for Students

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

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

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories 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 SSfS, 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 Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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