Trifles Study Guide

Trifles by Susan Glaspell

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Introduction

Susan Glaspell's one-act play, *Trifles*, is based on actual events that occurred in Iowa at the turn of the century. From 1899-1901 Glaspell worked as a reporter for the *Des Moines News,* where she covered the murder trial of a farmer's wife, Margaret Hossack, in Indianola, Iowa. Hossack was accused of killing her husband, John, by striking him twice in the head with an ax while he slept.

Initially it was assumed that burglars had murdered the farmer, but a subsequent sheriff s investigation turned up evidence suggesting Mrs. Hossack was unhappy in her marriage. Ultimately, she was charged with and found guilty of the crime and sentenced to life in prison.

Over the course of sixteen months, Glaspell wrote twenty-six articles covering the case, from the announcement of the murder until Hossack's conviction. The author found herself feeling more and more sympathy for the accused, in spite of the grisly nature of the crime.

Years later, Glaspell and her husband, George Cook, along with some friends, founded the Prov-incetown Players, an amateur theatrical company on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. In 1916 the group presented a summertime series of plays that included Eugene O'Neill's *Bound East for Cardiff*. In need of a new play to end the season, Cook suggested Glaspell should write a one-act for the company. Her memory of the Hossack trial inspired *Trifles*.

Trifles is a murder mystery that explores gender relationships, power between the sexes, and the nature of truth. In the play, the farmer and his wife never actually appear; instead, the story focuses on the prosecutor, George Henderson, who has been called in to investigate the murder; Henry Peters, the local sheriff; Lewis Hale, a neighboring farmer who discovered Wright's body; and Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale, wives to the two local men.

While the men bluster and tramp around the farmhouse searching for clues, the women discover bits of evidence in the "trifles" of a farmer's wife her baking, cleaning and sewing. Because the men virtually ignore the women's world, they remain blind to the truth before their eyes.

Author Biography

On July 1,1882, Susan Glaspell was born in Davenport, Iowa. She excelled in academics as a student, studying Latin and journalism. After graduation from high school, she worked as a newspaper reporter for the *Davenport Morning Republican*, then as the society editor for the *Weekly Outlook*. From 1897-1899 she attended Drake University and received a Ph.D. in Philosophy.

Immediately after college she resumed her career as a journalist, writing for the *Des Moines News*. In 1900 she was assigned to cover the trial of Margaret Hossack, an Iowa farmer's wife accused of murdering her husband while he slept. The trial would later become the basis for Glaspell's short story "A Jury of Her Peers" and one-act play *Trifles*.

Glaspell traveled the world from 1901-1915, working as a freelance author. She spent time in Chicago, New York, Colorado, and Paris, while contributing articles to the *Chicago Daily Review*, as well as national magazines like *Harper's, Leslie's*, and *Munsey's.* In 1913 she married George Cram Cook, a longtime friend who had recently divorced his second wife. The couple settled in New York and spent summers in Provincetown, on Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

Glaspell made quite an impression on the American literary scene in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Along with Cook, and the legendary playwright Eugene O'Neill, she helped found the Provincetown Players, an amateur theatre company that was partly responsible for launching the "little theatre" movement across America, and helped define American dramatic literature in the modern era. Eleven of her plays were first produced by the Provincetown Players, including *Trifles, The People, The Outside, Woman's Honor, Bemice, Inheritors, and The Verge.*

In 1931 she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for her play, *Alison's House*. In the full-length drama, the family of a dead poet reflect on her life and writing and discover a greater understanding of love and each other.

Glaspell was a prolific writer. At the time of her death in 1948, she had written fifty short stories, nine novels, and fourteen plays; most of these works feature strong female protagonists and stories that focus on the experiences of women. Perhaps not surprisingly, her work faded from public interest during the conservative 1950s, and practically disappeared from bookshelves and the stages of amateur theatres. Yet in the past few decades, her work is being reexamined and celebrated by a new group of critics and audiences.

Plot Summary

The setting for *Trifles*, a bleak, untidy kitchen in an abandoned rural farmhouse, quickly establishes the claustrophobic mood of the play. While a cold winter wind blows outside, the characters file in one at a time to investigate a violent murder: the farm's owner, John Wright, was apparently strangled to death while he slept, and his wife, Minnie, has been taken into custody as a suspect in the crime.

The sheriff, Henry Peters, is the first to enter the farmhouse, followed by George Henderson, the attorney prosecuting the case. Lewis Hale, a neighbor, is next to enter. The men cluster around a stove to get warm while they prepare for their investigation.

Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale follow the men into the kitchen; yet, they hesitate just inside the door. They are obviously quite disturbed by what has happened in the house and proceed with more care than their husbands.

In a play filled with minor details (trifles) that take on major significance, the entrance of the characters is very revealing. There is an obvious divide social, psychological, and physical separating the men from the women, a fact that takes on a larger significance as the play progresses.

The investigation begins with Henderson questioning Lewis, who discovered the murder the day before. Lewis explains that he was on his way into town with a load of potatoes and stopped at the Wright farmhouse to see if John and Minnie wanted to share a telephone line with him, since they were neighbors. The farmer admits that he didn't think John would be interested, since he didn't like to talk much and didn't seem to care about what his wife might want.

When he appeared at the Wright's door early in the morning, he found Minnie rocking nervously in a chair, pleating her apron. When he asked to see her husband, she quietly told Lewis that he was lying upstairs with a rope around his neck, dead.

Lewis summoned his partner, Harry, to check the grisly scene. The two men found John just as his wife described him. Minnie claimed someone strangled him in the middle of the night without disturbing her. "I sleep sound," she explained to her shocked neighbor.

Henderson suggests the men should look around the house for clues, beginning with the bedroom upstairs and the barn outside. Henry casually dismisses the room where Minnie sat, suggesting there is "nothing here but kitchen things."

It is those very kitchen things, however, which prove to be the most telling clues about what really happened in the Wright farmhouse. Climbing up on a chair to view the top shelf of a cupboard closet, Henderson finds some broken jars of fruit preserves. Mrs. Peters asserts that Minnie was afraid those jars would freeze and break while she was away. "Well, can you beat the woman!" Henry scoffs, "Held for murder and worryin' about her preserves." Lewis chimes in, "Well, women are used to worrying over trifles."

This callous exchange highlights one of Glaspell's most important themes in the play differences between the sexes and propels the plot forward into its next stage, the real detective work accomplished by Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale.

The men go upstairs to continue their investigation, giving the two women a chance to talk privately for the first time. As they gather things to take to Minnie a change of clothes, her shawl, and her familiar apron Mrs. Hale remembers her friend from years ago, before she married John. "She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively, when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls singing in the choir," Mrs. Hale recalls.

Minnie married John, who moved her to a lonesome farmhouse at the bottom of a hill. John was, by all accounts, a taciturn man with a violent temper. Under his roof, Minnie no longer socialized, and her gay party attire turned to drab, functional house clothes.

What the men are seeking, Mrs. Peters notes, is evidence of a specific incident that must have sparked the murder. What the women are finding, however, are small signs of detachment and frustration everywhere a loaf of bread left outside a breadbox, a table partly cleaned, and a piece of quilt with frantic, uneven stitching. The men return and pass through the kitchen in time to hear the women discussing whether Minnie was going to quilt or knot the sewing project. To them, the question is frivolous, just the sort of thing women use to occupy their time.

While their husbands search for evidence outside the house, Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale discover the final, essential clues to the mystery in the kitchen. While looking for some paper and string to wrap Minnie's things, Mrs. Peters discovers an empty birdcage with a broken door in a cupboard.

Neither woman can recall whether she actually had a bird, but Mrs. Hale remembers that Minnie did have a beautiful singing voice when she was younger. Their find takes on tragic significance, however, when Mrs. Hale opens Minnie's sewing box and discovers a small canary wrapped in a piece of silk with a broken neck.

Suddenly, the men return. Instinctively, Mrs. Hale hides the sewing box under the pieces of quilt. When Henderson notices the cage and asks about the bird, Mrs. Peters joins Mrs. Hale in hiding evidence. "We think the cat got it," she lies.

The men decide to take one final look around upstairs, leaving the women alone to decide their course of action. Neither will say what is on their minds out loud, but both show understanding and sympathy for the plight of Mrs. Wright.

As a girl, Mrs. Peters remembers a boy killing her kitten with a hatchet, which brings back her feelings of rage and helplessness. She also recalls years of loneliness and desolation, when she and her husband were homesteading in the Dakota plains, and her baby died, leaving her alone in the house.

For her part, Mrs. Hale has vivid memories of Minnie Foster when she was happy and outgoing, before she became Mrs. Wright, imprisoned in this bleak farmhouse, cut off from the world.

The women consider their alternatives: disclose what they know, or cover up the clues that suggest a motive to the crime. Mrs. Peters finds the answer in the men's patronizing treatment. "My, it's a good thing the men couldn't hear us," she says half-jokingly. "Wouldn't they just laugh! Getting all stirred up over a little thing like a dead canary." Without admitting it aloud, this is the only excuse the women need to keep Minnie's private agony a secret.

The men return once again. Henderson glances quickly at the items Mrs. Peters has collected to take to Minnie, not noticing the sewing box with the dead bird.

While the men take one last look around to examine the windows of the house, Mrs. Peters frantically tries to hide the box in her handbag. It won't fit and she begins to panic. Just as the doorknob turns and the men start back into the room Mrs. Hale finds room for the box in her coat. The trifles are safely hidden.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

The setting of this one-act play is a farmhouse kitchen in the Midwest. Instead of modern appliances, there is a hand pump at the sink for water, and a wood-burning stove for warmth and for cooking. From the kitchen, there are three doors: one to the parlor, one to the upstairs, and one to the shed and then on to the outdoors. In the middle of the room is a rustic dining table and chairs. The room has not been cleaned up and looks as if someone was interrupted in the midst of cooking a meal. Dirty pans are stacked under the sink, a loaf of bread is sitting outside the breadbox and a dishtowel is sitting on the table.

The door to the shed opens and Sheriff Peters, County Attorney Henderson and Lewis Hale, a neighboring farmer, enter the kitchen followed by the sheriff's wife and the neighbor's wife.

The sheriff and the county attorney begin questioning Mr. Hale about events that occurred on the previous day. Mr. Hale told them he was on his way into town and decided to stop and ask John Wright to go together with him for the cost of a party telephone line. He had asked him in the past but he said no, so Mr. Hale wanted to talk to him about it in front of his wife with the hope that she might have some influence.

When Mr. Hale knocked on the Wrights' door, there was no answer. It was after eight o'clock, so he knew they were up. When he knocked a second time, he thought he heard an answer, so he went in. He found Mrs. Wright rocking in a rocking chair and pleating her apron in her hands. He asked to speak to her husband, but she told him no because he was dead. She indicated that he was upstairs and that he had been strangled with a rope. When he asked her who had done that to her husband, she said she did not know because she had slept through it.

At the end of Hale's story, the men prepare to investigate upstairs. The county attorney opened a kitchen cupboard and noticed that a jar of preserves was broken and spilled on the shelf. Mrs. Peters explained that they must have frozen in the night and the jar broke. She said that Mrs. Wright worried about her fruit freezing. The county attorney indicated that Mrs. Wright would have more important things to worry about when they finished the investigation, but the sheriff said that women always worry about trifles.

The county attorney washed the preserves off his hands in the sink and reached for the roller towel to dry them, but he could not find a clean place on the towel to use. He became critical of Mrs. Wright's housekeeping skills, but Mrs. Hale defended her saying that, "there is a great deal of work to be done on a farm." The county attorney asked Mrs. Hale if she and Mrs. Wright were friends. She said that she liked Mrs. Wright but never felt comfortable in the house with Mr. Wright around; that the house was not a very happy place.

As the men prepared again to go upstairs, Sheriff Hale reminded the county attorney that Mrs. Hale is to get some of Mrs. Wright's belongings to take to her. The attorney agreed, but told Mrs. Hale that he wanted to see everything she selected and to keep an eye out for anything that might help his investigation. The men disappeared up the stairs.

The women examine the kitchen a bit more closely, noticing that Mrs. Wright had been making bread and that she left the bread out on the counter instead of putting it away. They examined all of the jars of fruit and found only one that was not broken, a jar of cherries.

The women go into another room and return carrying a dress, a petticoat a skirt, and a pair of shoes to take to Mrs. Wright in jail. Mrs. Hale remembers Mrs. Wright when she was younger, a pretty town girl who sang in the choir, before she met her husband. She suspected that Mrs. Wright was not involved in the ladies' auxiliary because her husband was stingy, she felt shabby and like she had nothing to contribute. Mrs. Peters remembered that Mrs. Wright had asked for an apron and for her little shawl that was hanging behind the door.

The women begin speculating on the crime, knowing that the prosecutor will make fun of Mrs. Wright for saying that she slept through the murder. They speculate on the craftiness with which the crime had to have been committed for Mr. Wright, himself, not to be aware of it. It is common knowledge that there was a gun in the house, but there is no apparent motive, and no sign of anger.

Next, the women discover Mrs. Wright's sewing basket with a quilt that she had begun sewing. They wondered aloud if she was going to hand stitch or tie the quilt. The men returned in time to hear the question, and again laughed at the women for worrying about trifles. The men went outside to the barn.

The women noticed that the quilt square that Mrs. Wright had been working on had erratic stitches in it, uneven and scattered. Mrs. Hale pulls out the uneven stitches and does them over again neatly, wondering the whole time, what Mrs. Wright was so nervous about that made her stitches erratic.

Next, the women noticed an empty birdcage. Mrs. Hale remembers a traveling salesman selling canaries cheap a few months prior, but she does not know if Mrs. Wright had purchased one. The birdcage door was broken, with one hinge pulled apart as if someone had been too rough with it. Mrs. Hale expresses regret that she had not come to visit Mrs. Wright sometimes. She said the only reason she did not is because she didn't like the place. It was always so lonesome and secluded. Mrs. Peters reassures her that she should not feel bad about it; as she was so busy herself with her farm and children.

The women talk for a while about Mr. Wright. Though Mrs. Hale concedes that John Wright was a "good" man who did not drink, kept his word and paid his debts, she also said he was a hard man, "Like a raw wind that gets to the bone." Mrs. Wright, according

to Mrs. Hale, was like a bird herself, pretty and timid, and she sang sweetly. Mrs. Hale suggested that it would be nice to take Mrs. Wright's quilting to her to give her something to pass the time in jail.

The women begin to gather up her belongings, searching for the rest of the sewing materials. They find a pretty box and think that maybe the scissors are in there, but instead find the dead canary, its neck wrung.

The men return from outside as Mrs. Hale slips the box under the quilt pieces. The men again make fun of the women and their worries over trifles. The men again disappear upstairs, still searching for evidence of a motive.

The women realized with horror that Mrs. Wright loved the bird and was going to bury it in the pretty box. Mrs. Peters remembers when she was a young girl that a neighbor boy killed her kitten. She says if she had not been held back, she would have hurt him. Mrs. Hale expresses certainty that John Wright killed the bird. She reflects that after having the bird singing in the house, the stillness would be overwhelming. Mrs. Peters could relate to stillness, reminiscing about being on a homestead alone after the death of her first child. Mrs. Hale again expresses regret that she did not visit Mrs. Wright, and an understanding of the way things are for women.

The women agree that Mrs. Wright should not be told about the shattered fruit jars just as the men return downstairs. The county attorney comments that the case is pretty clear except that they have not found any hard evidence. He briefly looks over the belongings that the women have gathered to take to Mrs. Wright and approves them. Mrs. Hale hides the pretty box with the dead bird in her jacket pocket to dispose of it later.

The last bit of conversation is made up of the men questioning the women again about the quilting, one of many women's trifles.

Analysis

The success of this play rests largely on the dramatic irony that develops as the play progresses. The men think they are in charge of the situations and meticulously search the house, inside and outside, for evidence and a motive for the murder that has been committed. They laugh at the two women, claiming that women worry about trifling details. Dramatic irony develops as the audience watches the women locate the evidence and the motive to solve the case through trifles, such as unbaked bread, an empty birdcage and an unfinished quilt. They also witness the women withhold the information from the men with no intention of helping to solve the case.

Through the trifling details found and discussed by the women, the audience learns that Mrs. Wright had a pet canary that she loved and valued very much. It was her only company during the lonely days of farm work as she had no children and the farm was isolated from nearby neighbors. The bird becomes a symbol of Mrs. Wright's earlier life when Mrs. Hale compares her to a bird, describing Mrs. Wright as "kind of timid and-

fluttery." Before she married, Mrs. Wright sang in the local choir, wore pretty clothes and was lively. After her marriage, she was isolated from her old life in town, lost contact with her friends and no longer had time to sing in the choir. Her marriage and her life on the farm became her cage, silencing her voice and strangling the life out of her much as her husband, John, literally strangled the canary.

Strangulation continues to be an important element in the story as the method of John Wright's murder. He too, was ultimately silenced when he was strangled in his sleep. It seems a just way to die for a man who strangled the beauty and the life out of the living beings in his household.

Another trifling detail discovered by the women is the unbaked loaf of bread and, with it, a loaf of bread sitting beside the bread box- not in it. Mrs. Wright appeared to have been interrupted, though it is unclear when the interruption occurred. If she had started baking in the morning then there was no intruder in the night. If she had begun baking the night before, then there could have been a significant interruption, an incident that could prove to be a motive. The men also see the bread, but dismiss it as a trifle without understanding its significance.

The women's discovery of the dead canary is the climax of this play; the point where the audience fully comprehends the abuse that has occurred in this farm house and knows who is responsible for John Wright's untimely death by strangulation. The dramatic irony is at its most intense because the men in the play have no idea what happened, while the audience knows that the women they treat patronizingly have found the needed evidence.

Mrs. Hale's closing line, "We call it- knot it, Mr. Henderson," finalizes and focuses all of the dramatic irony inherent in this play. Mrs. Hale is saying that Mrs. Wright did knot the noose, but the men think Mrs. Hale is speaking of quilting. The men dismissed the women's conversation about quilting as trivial, but it was the quilting and other trivial details that led the women and the audience to understand what happened. The audience knows that the women will not share their knowledge, but the men do not even know they have any knowledge. The men, who thought they were efficient and important, fail completely. The audience knows that the women, who were dismissed by the men, have solved the murder.

Characters

Lewis Hale

Lewis Hale is a farmer and neighbor of the Wright family. A straightforward, honest man, Hale is a bit rough around the edges from the harsh life of a rural farmer.

Hale was the first to discover John's murder when he stopped by the Wright's farmhouse to interest them in sharing a telephone line. He is slow to judgment and hesitant to suggest that Minnie may have been involved somehow.

Mrs, Hale

Mrs. Hale is the wife of Lewis. At first timid, she eventually commits what she thinks is a justifiable crime: a conspiracy to conceal evidence from a murder investigation.

Mrs. Hale accompanies her husband to the crime scene to gather items for the imprisoned Minnie. As the men search the house for clues, however, Mrs. Hale gets frustrated with their patronizing attitude; she understands and empathizes with Minnie's isolation and alienation. In their youth, she was friends with Minnie, who was then a vivacious and interesting girl. She knew Minnie was isolated and probably lonely after her marriage; moreover, she noticed her change into a drab, quiet woman as the years passed.

Of the two women in the play, Mrs. Hale seems to be the more observant and more prone to action. It is she who notices most of the clues first the bread left outside the box, the hasty quilt stitching, and the dead canary in Mrs. Wright's sewing kit. She is the one who suggests that John was an unhappy, abusive man who may have deserved his fate.

Ultimately, it is Mrs. Hale who hides the dead canary evidence suggesting a motive for the crime in her coat pocket to prevent the men from finding it.

George Henderson

George Henderson is the attorney that will eventually prosecute Minnie. He is younger than the other characters; accordingly, he is more brash, sarcastic, and foolish. When questioning Hale about John's murder he misses important details.Unlike Hale and Peters, Henderson is quick to make judgments. At the end of the play, he mocks

Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters for their interest in whether Minnie was going to quilt or knot her sewing project, not realizing the answer was actually one of the clues he was seeking.

Henry Peters

As sheriff in the small, rural town, Henry Peters plays a surprisingly small part in the investigation of John's murder. He visited the farmhouse the day before, found John's body, arrested Minnie, and secured the premises.

The morning of the investigation, Peters sent one of his men out to build a fire and warm the house. Now, he has turned the investigation over to Henderson, and says very little himself.

Mrs. Peters

In some ways, Mrs. Peters is an outsider in this bleak, rural community. Unlike Mrs. Hale, she did not know Minnie as a young woman, and therefore doesn't see the toll living with John had taken on her.

However, she does understand the loneliness and rage Minnie felt. As a child, she watched angrily and helplessly as a boy viciously killed her kitten with a hatchet. Later in life, while she and her husband were living in the Dakota countryside, her two-year-old baby died.

Mrs. Peters begins the play as the cautionary voice of reason, warning Mrs. Hale, "I don't think we ought to touch things." By the end, however, she empathizes with Minnie's actions and helps Mrs. Hale conceal evidence.

Themes

Gender Differences

Perhaps the single most important theme in *Trifles* is the difference between men and women. The two sexes are distinguished by the roles they play in society, their physicality, their methods of communication and vital to the plot of the play their powers of observation.

In simple terms, *Trifles* suggests that men tend to be aggressive, brash, rough, analytical and self-centered; in contrast, women are more circumspect, deliberative, intuitive, and sensitive to the needs of others. It is these differences that allows Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale to find the clues needed to solve the crime, while their husbands miss the same clues.

Glaspell differentiates between her male and female antagonists as they enter the Wright farmhouse at the beginning of the play. The men stomp through the door first, and head purposefully toward the stove for warmth. They are the leaders of the community the sheriff, the local prosecutor, and a neighboring farmer. They get to business immediately, discussing the facts of the case.

Meanwhile the women, perhaps sensing the gloom and terror in the house, enter timidly and stand close to each other just inside the door. They are partly identified by the roles their husbands play. An important detail is they are always referred to by their married names only, and no first names are used.

As the investigation commences, the men seek obvious clues that might suggest a motive for the crime perhaps indications of alcoholism or physical abuse. Henderson overlooks the small, but significant, clues that tell the real story. He ignores Lewis, who tells him that John never seemed to care what his wife wanted, and dismisses the mess in the kitchen as the result of shoddy housekeeping. When the women rise to Minnie's defense, he even mocks them for simply trying to be "loyal to your sex."

When the men leave the room to examine other parts of the house, the real detective work begins. The women discuss Minnie as she used to be a happy, young girl in pretty clothes who sang in the town choir. Because their lives are also focused on the home, Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale are able to interpret some of the silent cries for help that the men were unable to see or hear.

By the time they find the damaged birdcage and the dead canary, Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale know the truth: John Wright drove his wife to murder him by isolating her from her friends and depriving her of beauty and song. The "trifles" of the play embody the possessive, patronizing attitude men sometimes have toward the lives of women.

Isolation

The devastating effects of isolation especially on women is another theme of the play. The men seem better suited to the loneliness and isolation of rural farming. John Wright, for example, is described as a hard-working farmer who kept to himself. He did not share a telephone line, and no one other than his wife knew him very well.

The women, on the other hand, are deeply affected by isolation. Mrs. Peters remembers with dread when she and her husband were homesteading in the Dakota countryside and her only child died, leaving her alone in the house all day while her husband was out working the farm. Mrs. Hale, who has several children of her own, imagines how terrible it would be to have to live in an empty house, like Minnie, with nothing but a canary and a taciturn man for company.

For Minnie, isolation drove her to murder. Remembered by Mrs. Hale as a happy, outgoing young girl in pretty clothes, Minnie Foster's whole life changed when she married John. They lived in a gloomy farmhouse "down in a hollow" where Minnie couldn't even see the road. No one came to visit, and she did not go out. The couple was childless, and John killed the only other life in the house: the canary his wife bought to sing to her and ease her lonely mind.

Style

One-Act Play

The *structure* of a play affects all of its most important elements the plot, characters, and themes. An episodic play, such as William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, requires many twists and turns of plot, numerous characters and locations, and great stretches of time in order for the story to unfold. A climactic play, such as Sophocles's famous tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, typically presents only a handful of characters involved in a single plot, which builds toward a climax the most important moment in the play.

One of the most restrictive forms is the one-act play, a style favored by *Trifles* author Susan Glaspell. In every respect the one-act play is more tightly compressed than a full-length climactic Greek tragedy. Because one-acts are typically short, with playing times of fifteen to forty-five minutes, the number of characters introduced must be limited, and their personalities must be developed quickly.

Glaspell takes full advantage of this limitation in *Trifles*. The men in the play are stereotypical characters. Their actions and words immediately suggest personalities that are condescending, egotistical, and self-important. The women, meanwhile, begin the play timidly, allowing their husbands to blunder about the crime scene. Then, given the chance to be alone, they open up to each other and show a strong sense of female intuition that allows them to solve the play's mystery very quickly.

Because of the limited time frame, the one-act format also tends to focus on a single location and a tight plot. Each of these aspects holds true for *Trifles*. There is a single setting, the Wright farmhouse, which is located in the countryside and set back from the road, a lonely, desolate place. The plot involves seeking clues to suggest a motive for the murder of John Wright. Furthermore, there are no unimportant words or actions. Everything that is said and done, from the way the characters enter Mrs. Wright's kitchen to the discovery of her dead canary, relates in some way to the mystery at hand.

Local Color

In the late nineteenth century, a popular style of writing known as "local color" emerged, a style characterized by its vivid description of some of the more idiosyncratic communities in the American landscape. Writers such as Bret Harte, Mark Twain, and Nathaniel Hawthorne created characters whose speech and attitudes reflected the deep South, the western frontier, or New England Puritanism. Their short stories and novels particularly appealed to people in larger cities, who found these descriptions of faraway places exotic and entertaining.

Susan Glaspell began writing during this age of regionalism, and *Trifles* incorporates many of the elements of local color: regional dialect, appropriate costuming, and characters influenced by a specific locale.

Trifles is filled with a strong sense *of place*. The characters in the play are deeply rooted in their rural environment. Lewis Hale was on his way into town with a load of potatoes when he stopped by the Wright's house to see about sharing a party line telephone, a common way for people in small communities to afford phone service during the first few decades of the century. The lives of the women seem to consist of housekeeping chores, food preparation, sewing, and raising children, with little time left for socializing.

The characters' manner of speech reveals their limited education and rural, Midwestern environment. They use a colloquial grammar peppered with country slang. "I don't think a place'd be any cheerfuller for John Wright's being in it," Mrs. Hale tells Henderson. Their lives, too, have been deeply affected by their regional experiences. While homesteading in the Dakota countryside, Mrs. Peter's two-year-old baby died, leaving her alone in the house while her husband was away.

Still, at the same time that she provides these carefully crafted details of country life, Glaspell provides her audience with ideas that transcend local color. The struggle between the sexes, loneliness, and the elusive nature of truth are all experiences shared by people across cultures and boundaries of geography.

Historical Context

In many ways, Susan Glaspell's success at the turn of the century signaled a new age for women, and *Trifles*, still her best-known play, represents the struggles women of her era faced. Born in 1876, Glaspell's grandparents were some of the pioneers who settled her hometown of Davenport, Iowa.

In an age when few women went to college, and even fewer actually sought careers beyond menial labor outside the home, Glaspell did both, graduating from Drake University with a Ph.D. in Philosophy in 1899, and immediately embarking on a lifetime of freelance journalism, playwriting, and fiction writing.

In 1916, the year Glaspell wrote *Trifles* for the Provincetown Players, some of the important issues of the day were women's suffrage, birth control, socialism, union organizing, and the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud. Women had not yet achieved the right to vote, and in most states women could not sit on juries. It wasn't until 1920 that the 19th Amendment granted women the right to vote.

Only a year after she was jailed for writing *Family Limitation*, the first book on birth control, Margaret Sanger opened America's first birth control clinic in Brooklyn, New York. Charged with "maintaining a public nuisance," she was once again arrested, and served thirty days in the Queens County Penitentiary. It wasn't until 1973 that the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision gave women the right to choose an abortion during the first few months of pregnancy.

Life in America's industrial cities was harsh. Manufacturing jobs paid only a few dollars a day for 10-12 hours of work, and children under fourteen constituted a sizable portion of America's workforce. The factory system created wage-earning opportunities for women, leading to a chance for financial independence.

Yet women earned significantly less than their male counterparts, and most were relegated to jobs in domestic service, textile factories, or offices. Unfortunate women often found themselves working in "sweatshops," small factories that forced employees to spend long hours in a dirty, unsafe environment for substandard wages.

Life for rural women, as shown by Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale in *Trifles*, was not much better. A large portion of America's population was still scattered in rural towns, ranches, and farmsteads across the country at the turn of the century. Women were largely responsible for the maintenance of the family, including cleaning, laundry, food preparation, and childcare. They often had to make clothes and bedding for families.

Farming could be lonely life for women. In *Trifles*, Mrs. Peters, whose husband is now the sheriff of their small community, remembers when she and her family were homesteaders in the Dakota territory, and her first baby died, leaving her alone in the house most of the day while her husband worked outside. Another character, Minnie, is

driven to kill her husband as a result of the hopelessness and desperation she feels from her isolated and joyless life.

In dramatizing the lives of these rural women, Glaspell captured an intimate portrait of American history on the stage. She also contributed to a significant literary and artistic event: America's "Little Theatre Movement." *Trifles* was produced by the Provincetown Players, an amateur, experimental group of actors, designers, and playwrights Glaspell and her husband, George Cook, had assembled at their vacation home on Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

The goal of the Provincetown Players was to present plays by new American writers, relying on innovative scenery and staging techniques. The group moved to Greenwich Village in New York City in the fall of 1916 and remained active until 1929, helping to launch the careers of such notable authors as Eugene O'Neill, e. e. cummings, Edna Ferber, and Edna St. Vincent Millay.

At the same time that the Provincetown Players were finding success in New York, similar "little theatres" began springing up around the country. The Toy Theatre in Boston and the Chicago Little Theatre opened in 1912; and the Detroit Arts and Crafts Theatre opened in 1916. By 1917, nearly fifty such organizations were producing plays in what would become, by the end of the century, a diverse network of regional theaters across America, offering quality alternatives to community theaters and standard Broadway fare.

Critical Overview

Unfortunately, there has never been a high-profile performance of *Trifles* in a major, mainstream theatrical venue, so production reviews are scarce and tend to describe performances at regional, amateur theaters, and colleges across the country. Most critical commentary has focused on the *published* literary work and its contributions to feminist thought and literature.

In a preface to a collection of essays, *Susan Glaspell: Essays on Her Theater and Fiction*, contemporary playwright Megan Terry lauded Glaspell's work. She maintained:

I admire the control, the precision and the power of *Trifles*. It never tires. It seems to be a perfect play and accomplishes all the playwright's intentions. It is a model of subtlety and understatement. I marvel at its compactness and perfection, and the satisfaction it conveys to the reader or audience in the sure achievement of its creator. The play is more than an inspiration, it's a quiet, firm and constant standard to match. The wry warmth of her mind, the compassion of her heart combine with the architecture of her play to give you a total feeling of these Mid-West people. The work is suffused with the sense of justice, wit, and fairness Glaspell must have possessed as a person.

This sentiment is echoed in the work of other critics. In an essay from the same collection of essays, Linda Ben-Zvi was encouraged by the playwright' s portrayal of women in *Trifles*, particularly in the actions of Mrs. Peters andMrs. Hale at the end of the play. "Glaspell does not actually present the victimization of women or the violent acts such treatment may engender," Ben-Zvi noted, "instead, she stages the potential for female action and the usurpation of power. By having the women assume the central positions and conduct the investigation and the trial, she actualizes an empowerment that suggests that there are options short of murder that can be imagined for women."

Ben-Zvi examined the Hossack murder trial that inspired Glaspell to write *Trifles*. She also explored the role of women at the turn of the century and found parallels with the lives of women in the present day.

She asserted: "It is either a testament to the skill with which Glaspell constructed *Trifles* and "A Jury of Her Peers" or proof of how little women's lives have changed since 1916 that contemporary feminist critics still use the play and story as palimpsests for their own readings of contemporary feminist issues, and these readings still point to some of the dilemmas that faced Glaspell and her personaein 1901 and 1916."

Elaine Hedges, in an essay titled "Small Things Reconsidered: 'A Jury of Her Peers'," agreed that the most important theme of the story is the role of women in society then or now and praises Glaspell's mastery of local color. "Women's role, or 'place,' in society, their confinement and isolation, the psychic violence wrought against them, their power or powerlessness vis-a-vis men, are not concerns restricted to Glaspell's time and place," Hedges asserted, "But these concerns achieve their imaginative force and

conviction in her story by being firmly rooted in, and organically emerging from, the carefully observed, small details of a localized way of life."

From the baking shelf in Minnie's kitchen, to her apron, shawl, and pieces of quilt, it is the rural environment and the tiny details of life on a Midwestern farm that speak volumes about the plight of women on the American frontier.

Liza Maeve Nelligan maintained that those same details reinforce the idea of women as mere household objects. In "The Haunting Beauty from the Life We've Left: A Contextual Reading of *Trifles* and *The Verge*," Nelligan suggested, "*Trifles* neatly encapsulates what historians have named the 'cult of domesticity' of the nineteenth century." Accordingly, women were "pious, gentle, instinctive and submissive than men," and therefore suited to creating and maintaining a nurturing home environment.

While on the surface this may sound condescending and limiting, in practice, Nelligan contended, it may also have provided women a stronger common bond and purer sense of propriety and justice. "Clearly," Nelligan wrote, "Glaspell intended to show that women in the domestic sphere were vulnerable to the brutality of men like John Wright, but she also dramatizes the powerful sense of solidarity women shared and assumes that this solidarity was somehow responsible for superior female morality."

The same culture that largely confined women to the home, also excluded them from the ballot box and the courtroom. Karen Alkalay-Gut explored the *legal* issues of a play that presents the inconsistency of America's legal system at the turn of the century, when women could be tried for crimes, but were forbidden to vote for judges or sit on juries themselves. "The objective plot of Glaspell's most successful play, *Trifles*, is very much at odds with the triviality of the title," Alkalay-Gut asserted.

To her, the conundrum of the female characters in the play is no trifling matter. She contended: "Women, in the context of *Trifles* and even more in the story "Jury of Her Peers," are trapped by a social system that may lead them into crime and punish them when they are forced to commit it. It is this situation of the double bind with which the women of the play identify and which readers and audiences continue to explore."

Criticism

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

Lane A. Glenn is a Ph.D. specializing in theatre history and literature. In this essay he explores the dubious moral message of Susan Glaspell's Trifles.

Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* concerns a woman who was once young, pretty, and outgoing until she found herself in a loveless marriage with a stern, anti-social farmer. Her isolation, the gloom of her surroundings, and her husband's dispassion slowly drove her to the brink of insanity. She tried to fend off her depression with bits of gaiety brightly colored quilting and a caged songbird but when her husband, in a sudden act of aggression, broke the cage and killed the bird and its singing, she was driven over the edge.

In the middle of the night, she slipped a noose around her husband's neck, and strangled him in his sleep. When the county prosecutor arrives with the town's sheriff and a local farmer to investigate the scene, their wives quickly discover the miserable life Mrs. Wright led, and choose to hide the evidence of her crime.

For all its protestations about the treatment of women in rural America at the turn of the century, and in spite of the nearly unanimous approval of the play's final outcome among feminist literary critics, there is something unsavory about the resolution of *Trifles*. The most shocking and irresponsible act in the play is not John Wright's mental abuse of his wife, Minnie, nor is it even the murder itself, which happened before the play actually begins.

The most shocking act is the deliberate cover-up of Mrs. Wright's heinous act by two well inten-tioned but ultimately criminal conspirators. Their decision to cloak Mrs. Wright from the prying, but bumbling, eyes of the men in the play suggests a dubious sense of morality, and poses a frightening model of vigilante justice that, if widely adopted by those who felt neglected or marginalized, would seriously undermine the efforts of any judicial system.

Everything about *Trifles*, from its harsh treatment of its two-dimensional male characters to the play's final words, Mrs. Hale's clever, sarcastic remark, "We call it knot it, Mr. Henderson," suggests the audience should endorse, even applaud these women for their shrewdness and loyalty to their sex.

Yet what, really, is their accomplishment? In rationalizing and justifying Minnie Wright's actions, then concealing evidence from her investigators, these formerly innocent, law-abiding Midwestern farm wives have become accomplices to a grisly murder. In seeking retribution for perceived oppression, and in trying to *reform* society, they have actually denigrated the moral fiber of their world.

Interestingly, in the years since *Trifles* was first produced, many scholars have found reason after reason to condone the actions of Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale. Intentionally or not, Glaspell has encouraged successive generations of critical scofflaws.

Feminist critics in particular have suggested a variety of people to blame for the crime of murder, other than Minnie Wright. According to these sympathetic scholars, John Wright, her difficult husband, Mrs. Peters, Mrs. Hale, and the town that abandoned her all contributed to the inevitable tragedy.

In an essay entitled "A Map for Rereading: Or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts," Annette Kolodny suggests, "The essential crime in the story, we come to realize, has been the husband's inexorable strangulation, over the years, of Minnie Foster's spirit and personality; and the culpable criminality is the complicity of the women who had permitted the isolation and the loneliness to dominate Minnie Foster's existence. ..."

Kolodny employs one of the most important ruses of creative defense attorneys: create sympathy for the defendant, and cast the blame somewhere else. She even goes so far as to propose that "the ending is a happy one: Minnie Foster is to be set free, no motive having been discovered by which to prosecute her."

Karen F. Stein echoes Kolodny's judgment in "The Women's World of Glaspell's *Trifles*." She observes, "The lack of a telephone, the shabby furniture, the much-mended clothing, and a canary with a broken neck bear mute but telling witness to the harsh meanness and cruelty of John Wright. Considering Minnie her husband's victim (like her symbolic analogue, the strangled songbird), the women conspire to hide the evidence they discover." Taking her simple description of the play's action and symbolism a step further, Stein explains, "Through the women's identification with her, we understand Minnie's desperate loneliness, which drove her to do away with her brutal husband."

In her introduction to *Trifles* in *Images of Women in Literature*, Mary Anne Ferguson congratulates Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale for their service to women everywhere. "Through their concern for another woman and their decision to aid her, the women in Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* rise above male perceptions of them as ludicrously inferior," Ferguson contends. "Their awareness comes through shared anger at the men's views, and their actions invalidate the stereotype of women as 'fuzzy' thinkers concerned only with trifles. .. . The play shows that 'sisterhood is powerful' by belying the conception that women are catty among other women."

Perhaps it should not be surprising that the clearly immoral acts of Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale elicit sympathy, and even applause, from many critics and readers of *Trifles*. Glaspell has, after all, created a decidedly slanted, one-sided murder mystery out of a relationship that must have been more complex than the carefully scattered, symbolic clues it left behind.

The playwright builds support for the undeniably guilty Minnie Wright slowly and deliberately, one clue at a time, in order to allow resentment against the real victim of this crime the murdered Mr. Wright to fester in the minds of the audience.

By the time all the evidence has been assembled the lonely location of the Wright farmhouse, Mr. Wright's gruff personality, his wife's shabby clothes, and the strangulation of a canary Minnie Wright has been built up as a martyr for victimized

women everywhere. Her husband, on the other hand, has become an icon of aggression, cruelty, and masculine oppression. With no one to speak for him in front of "a jury of her peers," Mrs. Wright's husband never stood a chance.

The absence of Minnie Wright from the action of the play is another shrewd manipulation of emotion by Glaspell. Without her presence on the stage, the audience must construct its own impression of her character from the comments of the other women and the clues as they are found. Given this one-sided information, she becomes a sort of "Everywoman," an amalgamation of all women who have ever been lonely, in loveless marriages, or perhaps even abused by men.

In actuality, though, how far removed is Mrs. Wright from the ax-wielding Lizzie Borden, who murdered her parents in their sleep one night in 1892, then was acquitted of her crime because no one could believe a woman was capable of such an atrocity?

The guilt or innocence of the women of *Trifles* is not the central issue for every critic of the play. Linda Ben-Zvi, editor of *Susan Glaspell: Essays on Her Theater and Fiction*, and author of an essay titled," 'Murder, She Wrote': The Genesis of Susan Glaspell's Trifles," chose the middle ground. In her essay, which compares Glaspell's play to the actual events it is based on, she asserts that Glaspell was not seeking to either convict or pardon Minnie Wright, but to perform a much greater service for women everywhere by reminding them of the state of gender relations:

Whether Margaret Hossack or Minnie Wright committed murder is moot; what is incontrovertible is the brutality of their lives, the lack of options they had to redress grievances or to escape abusive husbands, and the complete disregard of their plight by the courts and by society. Instead of arguing their innocence, Glaspell concretizes the conditions under which these women live and the circumstances that might cause them to kill.

Ben-Zvi casts a long shadow of blame across a society that would push these women to such an act of desperation. She, like many critics before her, attempts to construct a defense that relies on extenuating circumstances justifiable homicide prompted by neglect and misery.

In so doing, she excuses the relative immorality of the play itself. "By having Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale unequivocally assume Minnie's guilt and also assume justification for her act," Ben Zvi continues, "Glaspell presents her audience/jury with a defense that forces it to confront the central issues of female powerlessness and disenfranchisement and the need for laws to address such issues." In other words, because the play serves a higher purpose the enlightenment of disenfranchised women everywhere its crimes should be excused.

The problem underlying the behavior of the women in *Trifles* is the inherent contradictions in their actions. They claim the moral high ground, and indeed, until they actually commit the crime of hiding evidence in a murder investigation, they are probably guiltless people. But their unfortunate choice to commit the crime pulls them

down from the height of moral purity to the depths of criminal depravity. They become no better than the murderess herself.

In the nineteenth century, women were widely considered to be naturally morally superior to men a condition that did not earn them more rights or privileges but raised expectations of their behavior in domestic settings. In "Gender Ideology and Dramatic Convention in Progressive Era Plays, 1890-1920," Judith L. Stephens suggests that a play like *Trifles* ironically defeats its own goal of liberating women from oppressive male stereotypes because it assumes some of the very stereotypes of women that were promoted by a male-dominated society.

In other words, by depicting the men in the play off as foolish and crude, and elevating the women to the status of clever sleuths, charged with defending one of their own against an unjustly oppressive male-dominated world, the play inadvertently promotes that which it seeks to undermine. Women are not morally superior to men, any more than men are intellectually superior to women, simply by virtue of their gender.

Stephens finds it regrettable that, by allowing the women in *Trifles* to subvert conventional law, Glaspell perpetuates the idea that men and women exist in separate spheres, forever isolated by uncontrollable differences. "By finding and concealing the incriminating evidence," Stephens insists, "the women win their own individual victory, but the system continues intact." Like the murderer Minnie Wright, they may have won the battle, but they have ultimately lost the war.

Source: Lane A. Glenn, *for Drama for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

In this essay, Russell compares the three female characters in Glaspell's play to female characters of Greek mythology. The critic cites numerous examples from the text that support her thesis.

On the surface, Susan Glaspell's one-act play *Trifles* focuses on the death of an oppressive husband at the hands of his emotionally abused wife in an isolated and remote farm in the midwest. Beneath the surface, the collective behaviors of Mrs. Hale, Mrs. Peters, and Mrs. Wright in GlaspelF s play bear strong resemblance to those of the Fates (Clotho the Spinner, Lachesis the Disposer of Lots, and Atropos the Cutter of the Thread) in Greek mythology. Although Glaspell brings new vigor to the myth, the attention given to Mrs. Hale's resewing the quilt, the change in Mrs. Peters's perspective on law and justice, and the rope placed by Mrs. Wright around her husband's neck are nonetheless grounded in the story of the Three Sisters who control the fate of men.

Mrs. Hale embodies the qualities of Clotho the Spinner, the sister who spins the thread of life. Mrs. Hale subtly suggests that Mrs. Wright is not the sole agent in the death of Mr. Wright. On the surface, Mrs. Hale's ungrammatical reference to that event, "when they was slipping the rope under his neck" (79), can be attributed to improper subject and verb agreement, which is not uncommon in certain regional dialects. However, the use of the plural pronoun and singular verb subtly suggests the involvement of more than one in a single outcome, and it foreshadows the conspiracy of the three women and their efforts to control the outcome or the fate of all characters. Furthermore, the information concerning the domestic life of the Wrights is supplied, or spun, mainly by Mrs. Hale; she describes Mr. Wright as "a hard man" and, with her recollections of the young Minnie Foster (now Mrs. Wright) as "kind of like a bird" (82), she establishes the connection of Mr. Wright's involvement in the physical death of the canary and spiritual death of his wife. The condescending manner in which the men joke about the women's concern regarding Mrs. Wright's intention "to quilt or just knot" the quilt evokes a defensive remark from Mrs. Hale in which she hints that it is unwise to tempt fate; she asserts, "I don't see as it's anything to laugh about" (79-80). Finally, by "just pulling out a stitch or two that's not sewed very good" and replacing it with her own stitching (80), Mrs. Hale symbolically claims her position as the person who spins the thread of life.

The second member of the Three Sisters, Lachesis the Disposer of Lots, is personified by Mrs. Peters. The viability of the thread spun by Mrs. Hale depends on the actions and reactions of Mrs. Peters. To claim her position as the member of the Fates responsible for assigning destiny, she must abandon objectivity and move toward subjectivity. Her objectivity is exemplified by her assertion that "the law is the law" and her view on physical evidence as she informs Mrs. Hale, "I don't think we ought to touch things" (79-80). The sight of the dead canary and the recognition that "somebody wrung its neck" marks Mrs. Peters's initiation into subjectivity and the sisterhood (83). The discovery of the dead bird awakens Mrs. Peters's suppressed childhood memories of rage toward the "boy [who] took a hatchet" and brutally killed her kitten (83). In her mind, the kitten, Mrs. Wright, and the bird become enmeshed. Mrs. Peters realizes that

the dead bird will be used to stereotype Mrs. Wright as a madwoman who overreacts to "trifles." At this point, Mrs. Peters emerges from the shadow of her role as the sheriff's wife and becomes "married to the law" (85). Her new concept of law subjectively favors justice over procedure. She claims her position as the sister who dispenses the lots in life when she moves to hide the bird and thus denies the men "something to make a story about" (85).

Mrs. Wright represents Atropos the Cutter of the Thread. Symbolically, Mrs. Wright is first linked to Atropos in Mr. Hale's description of her "rockin' back and forth" (73), a motion similar to that made by cutting with scissors. The connection to Atropos is further established when Mrs. Peters discovers the dead bird in Mrs. Wright's sewing box and exclaims, "Why, this isn't her scissors" (83). Ironically, the dead canary takes the place of the scissors: The death of the bird is directly tied to the fate of Mr. Wright. In addition, Mrs. Wright assumes mythical status through her spiritual presence and physical absence from the stage. Mr. Hale relates that in his questioning of Mrs. Wright, she admits that her husband "died of a rope round his neck," but she doesn't know how it happened because she "didn't wake up"; she is a sound sleeper (74-75). Mrs. Wright denies personal involvement in the death of her husband, yet she acknowledges that he died while she slept beside him in the bed. Mrs. Wright says, "I was on the inside" (75). Although she may be referring to her routine "inside" position of sleep behind her husband in the bed placed along the wall, Mrs. Wright's statement suggests a movement from the outside (her individual consciousness) to the inside (the collective consciousness of the Fates). Her involvement with the rope of death is the equivalent of severing the thread of life. She did not spin the thread, nor did she assign the lot; she merely contributed a part to the whole, and that collective whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. For this reason, Mrs. Wright is correct in denying individual knowledge or responsibility in the death of her husband.

In *Trifles*, Mrs. Hale weaves the story or describes the circumstances, Mrs. Peters weighs the evidence and determines the direction of justice, and Mrs. Wright carries out the verdict; although the procedure is somewhat reversed, the mythic ritual is performed nevertheless. Susan Glaspell's use of the Fates, or the Three Sisters, does not weaken her dramatization of women who are oppressed by men. Although some believe that the power of the Three Sisters rivals that of Zeus, Glaspell reminds her audience that, regardless of myth or twentieth-century law, it still takes three women to equal one man. That is the inequality on which she focuses.

Source: Judith Kay Russell. "Glaspell's *Trifles* in the *Explicator*, Vol. 55, no. 2, Winter, 1997, pp. 88-90.

Critical Essay #3

Mael examines Glaspell's play and a recent film adaptation by Sally Heckel within the context of feminist writings; the critic notes Glaspell's prescient accuracy in charting feminist doctrines.

In 1916 Susan Glaspell wrote "*Trifles*," a one-act play to complete the bill at the Wharf Theatre (the other play was *Bound East for Cardiff* by Eugene O'Neill). One commentator on Glaspell's work believes the play was originally intended as a short story, but, according to Glaspell, "the stage took it for its own." In 1917, however, Glaspell rewrote the work as a short story, "Jury of Her Peers," which appeared in *Best Short Stories* of 1917. That work was adapted by Sally Heckel in 1981 for her Academy-Award nominated film.

The setting for all three works is the same: a gloomy farmhouse kitchen belonging to John Wright, recently strangled, and his wife Minnie, now being held in prison for the crime. Three men enter the set: one, the neighboring farmer who discovered the body; another the district attorney; and a third, the sheriff. Two women accompany them: Mrs. Hale, the farmer's wife and childhood friend of Minnie and Mrs. Peters, the sheriff's wife. While the men search the bedroom and barn for clues to a possible motive for the murder, the women move about the kitchen, reconstructing Minnie's dismal life. Through their attentiveness to the "trifles" in her life, the kitchen things considered insignificant by the men, the two women piece together, like patches in a quilt, the events which may have led to the murder. And because they empathize with the missing woman, having lived similar though different lives, they make a moral decision to hide potentially incriminating evidence.

It is unlikely that had either woman been alone, she would have had sufficient understanding or courage to make the vital decision, but as the trifles reveal the arduousness of Minnie's life (and by implication of their own), a web of sisterhood is woven which connects the lives of all three enabling Mrs. Hale and Peters to counter patriarchal law, a decision particularly weighty for Mrs. Peters, who, as she is reminded by the district attorney, is "married to the law."

Having taught both play and short story in my "Images of Women in Literature" classes, I am continually amazed at the power of Glaspell's feminist understanding of the difficult decision with which the two early twentieth century rural women struggle. The volatile discussions which accompany class readings of these works, the questioning of the legality and morality of the women's choice, attest to the relevance of the issues Glaspell raises.

Current feminist research in developmental psychology can help increase our admiration for Glaspell's challenging presentation of the moral dilemma and the way in which Minnie's trifles raise the consciousness of both women, especially Mrs. Peters, moving them from awareness to anger to action. This research can also help us better appreciate Sally Heckel's recent adaptation of these issues to the medium of film, more

specifically her use of close-up and composition within the frame, to provide a cinematic equivalent of Glaspell' s statements in drama and prose.

Freud would not have been surprised by the decision taken by Mrs. Hale and Peters for in 1925 he wrote that women's superego was never "so inexorable, so impersonal, so independent of its emotional origins as we require it to be in men . . . for women the level of what is ethically normal is different from what it is in men . .. women show less sense of justice than men... they are less ready to submit to the great exigencies of life ... they are more often influenced in their judgment by feelings of affection or hostility." Freud's use of value-laden terms such as "less" emerges from a vision of moral development based upon a male model which tends "to regard male behavior as the 'norm' and female behavior as some kind of deviation from that norm."

Freud's model of mature moral development as "inexorable ... impersonal... independent of emotional origins" reappears in the 1960s as the sixth or post-conventional stage of Lawrence Kohlberg's six stages of moral development. Not surprisingly, when women are given Kohlberg's test, they rarely attain the sixth stage where decisions are based upon universal ethical principles but typically are stuck at the third and fourth (or conventional) levels where decisions are based upon contextual concerns.

But Kohlberg' s moral scale in turn relies upon a model of human development such as Erik Erik-son's "expansion of Freud" where separation, not relationship, becomes the model and measure of growth. Freud, Erickson, and Kohlberg, although recognizing that women's development is different from men's, present their model, based upon male experience, as universal.

Recent feminist research in developmental psychology challenges the sexual asymmetry of the patriarchal view in which male development is the norm and women's development is perceived (as with Freud) as "less." Of particular value for a discussion of Glaspell's and Heckel's works are Nancy Chodorow's writings on gender development and Carol Gilligan's on moral development.

According to Chodorow, the "process of becoming a male or female someone in the world begins in infancy with a sense of 'oneness,' a 'primary identification' . . . with the person responsible for early care. Emerging from this phase, every child faces the challenge of separation: distinguishing *self* from *other*.... Because women are the primary caretakers of children, that first 'other' is almost without exception female; consequently, boys and girls experience individuation and relationship differently. For boys, the typical development is more emphatic individuation and firmer ego boundaries, i.e., in order to become male, boys experience more strongly a sense of being "not female." For girls, because the primary parent (or other) is of the same sex," a basis for 'empathy' [is] built into their primary definition of self." They "come to experience themselves as less differentiated than boys, as more continuous with and related to the external object-world... .The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate."

This distinction in itself carries no value judgment and merely describes a difference. But because theories of psychological development (e.g., Freud's andErikson's)" focus on individuation .. . and maturity is equated with personal autonomy, concern with relationships appears as a weakness of women rather than as a human strength."

If we turn from gender to moral development, a similar pattern emerges. Because women "define themselves in a context of human relationship," their moral decisions differ from those of men. For women, typically, moral problems arise "from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights," require for their "resolution a mode of thinking that is contextual rather than . . . abstract," are concerned more with relationships than rules. Since Kohlberg perceives the expansion of moral understanding moving from the preconventional (or individual) through the conventional (or societal) to the post-conventional (or universal), women, who see the self and other as interdependent, whose moral judgments are more closely tied to feelings of empathy and compassion, who see moral problems as problems of responsibility in relationship, are more closely aligned with the conventional, a less mature stage of development. Gilligan, however, insists the relational bias in women's thinking is not a developmental deficiency as traditionally seen by psychologists but a different social and moral understanding. What we have are "two modes of judging, two different constructions of the moral domain one traditionally associated with masculinity and the public world of social power, the other with femininity and the privacy of domestic interchange."

With this theoretical basis, we can now turn to Glaspell's works and more fully appreciate her astute depiction of these two different modes of judging: the post-conventional revealed through the words and actions of all three men and by Mrs. Peters early in each work, the conventional mode voiced by Mrs. Hale and by Mrs. Peters at the end of each work as her consciousness has been raised through the demeaning remarks made by the men and, more significantly, through her exposure to the trifles of Minnie's life.

From the moment the men enter the kitchen, they begin to judge the absent Minnie according to abstract rules and rights. For example, dirty towels suggest to them that Minnie "was not much of a housekeeper." To Mrs. Hale, however, responding from within a specific context, dirty towels imply that either "there's a great deal of work to be done on a farm" or "towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands aren't always as clean as they might be." As the men continue to criticize or trivialize the domestic sphere (e.g., laughing at the women's concern for broken jars of preserves or their curiosity as to whether Minnie was going to "knot or quilt" her sewing), the stage directions indicate: "the two women move a little closer together."

Their moral "moving closer together" does not occur, however, until Mrs. Peters empathically understands Minnie's situation. For initially, Mrs. Peters parrots the male judgmental mode, demonstrating Glaspell's keen understanding of women's acquiescence to patriarchal law. When Mrs. Hale reproaches the men for disparaging remarks about Minnie's housekeeping, Mrs. Peters timidly responds: "It's no more than their duty." As Mrs. Hale restitches Minnie's erratic sewing on a piece of quilting, Mrs. Peters nervously suggests: "I don't think we ought to touch things." And when Mrs. Hale

objects to the men searching and "trying to get Minnie's own house to turn against her." Mrs. Peters replies: "But, Mrs. Hale, the law is the law." Her concern with "duty" and what one "ought to do" support a post-conventional view, corroborating the district attorney's trust in Mrs. Peters as "one of us."

Mrs. Hale, on the contrary, supports Minnie from the outset (although it's not clear that she could or would have taken the final action on her own). She responds to Mrs. Peter's comment that "the law is the law" with "and a bad stove is a bad stove" implying the need to re-interpret abstract law within a particular context. When Mrs. Peters declares: "The law has got to punish crime," Mrs. Hale urges a redefinition of one's notion of crime. Reflecting on Minnie's drab and lonely life, she cries: "I wish I'd come over here once in a while! .. . That was a crime! Who's going to punish that?"

As Mrs. Peters listens to Mrs. Hale's recollections of Minnie's past and comes into physical contact with Minnie's present, "It was as if something within her, not herself had spoken, and it found in Mrs. Peters something she did not know as herself." Minnie's lonely life evokes memories of the stillness when Mrs. Peter's first baby died while she was homesteading in the Dakotas. Minnie's violent response to the killing of her pet canary recalls murderous feelings in Mrs. Peters when her pet kitten had been brutally slain. Sharing her memories with Mrs. Hale, Mrs. Peters recognizes her connection with other women and, consequently, is capable of moving from a typically male to a more typically female mode of judgment.

In filming the Glaspell works, Sally Heckel utilizes the visual and aural resources of cinema to highlight each trifle, create context, and reinforce relationships. Through close-up (e.g., a jar of preserves, a piece of quilting), the supposedly insignificant kitchen things assume larger-than-life proportions emphasizing the significance of the domestic sphere. Through a combination of off-screen dialogue and closeup, Heckel creates the context necessary for the women's final decision. For example, when the district attorney is heard to state, "We need a motive," the camera provides a close-up of sugar spilt on a counter (evidence of interrupted work). Another man will state: "We need some definite thing to build a story around," and Heckel offers a close-up of Mrs. Hale's hand on the quilt piece, under which is hidden the dead canary. Thus, while the men speak abstractly off-screen, on-screen, Heckel depicts the particulars, the specific context from which the women will make their moral choice.

A third visual device, composition within the frame, creates relationships, and Heckel will use this to visually unite the women and/or objects. In one frame, she links the remaining jar of preserves, the broken bird cage, and the now-restitched piece of quilt a visual equivalent of the connections that lead Mrs. Hale and Peters to their joint decision.

Heckel's powerful contemporary film of Glaspell's earlier works attest to the vitality of Glaspell's vision. Fifty years before the current women's movement, Susan Glaspell understood how consciousness raising could empower women to take actions together which they could not take as individuals, how as women share their experiences, they

could act out of a new respect for the value of their lives as women, different from, but certainly equal to, the world of men.

Source: Phyllis Mael. "*Trifles*: The Path to Sisterhood" in *Literature/Film Quarterly*, Vol. 17, no. 4, 1989, pp. 281-84.

Adaptations

Trifles is based on a Glaspell short story entitled "*A Jury of Her Peers*." A short film version of A Jury of Her Peers was produced in 1981 by Texture Films. The program aired on PBS in 1987.

Another film adaptation of *A Jury of Her Peers*, entitled An *Eye for an Eye*, was created by Diana Maddox for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's "Guest Stage" television series in 1956.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation aired a radio drama version of *Trifles*, directed by Denis Johnston, in February, 1999.

Topics for Further Study

Read John Millington Synge's famous one-act play *Riders to the Sea* and compare it to Glaspell's *Trifles*. How does each play employ symbolism and local color? How is the one-act format important to each work?

One of the most important characters in *Trifles* is Mrs. Wright, yet she never appears on the stage. Why did Glaspell leave her out of the play? How does her absence impact Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters? Discuss the ways the play would be different if Mrs. Wright was present.

Research the lives of women in rural American communities at the turn of the century. What were typical tasks assigned to women? How did the requirements of frontier life determine the role women played in the family? Explore how the frontier experience affected the decisions made by Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale in the play.

Trifles contains several important *symbols*. In literature, a symbol is something that represents something else, and is often used to communicate deeper levels of meaning. What are some of the important symbols in *Trifles*? How does Glaspell use these symbols to propel the plot, and convey deeper levels of meaning about her characters or themes?

Compare and Contrast

1916: In the United States, the women's rights movement began in earnest in the nineteenth century. Margaret Sanger opens the first birth control clinic in 1916. In 1920 the 19th Amendment gives women the right to vote. The average life expectancy for men is 53.5 years; for women it is 55 years.

Today: Women have made great strides worldwide, and their average life expectancy remains 2-3 years longer than that of men (both are expected to live well past age seventy). The Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade* (1973) gives women the right to choose an abortion during the first few months of pregnancy.

1916: In cities, dance halls are popular places for young men women. "Ragtime" music moves into mainstream America in 1911 when Irving Berlin writes a syncopated dance tune called "Alexander's Ragtime Band." The sheet music to the song sells more than a million copies.

Today: Rap is a very popular musical genre in America. Like the ragtime music at the turn of the century, rap has its roots in black American culture, but has fans in all segments of society. While overall music sales increase a mere 9%, rap music boasts a 31% gain.

1916: Alcohol abuse is deemed one of the biggest problems faced by Americans. As a result, twenty-three states have anti-saloon laws in 1916. By 1919, the 18th Amendment to the Constitution is passed, prohibiting the "manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors." Prohibition begins in 1920. Thirteen years later the "experiment" is considered an economic and social disaster, and Prohibition is repealed in 1933.

Today: America's "War on Drugs" is often thought of as the new Prohibition. Between 1980-1995 the U.S. government spends over $300 billion trying to rid the country of illegal drugs, particularly marijuana and cocaine. As a result of the drug trade in America's inner cities, minorities are particularly affected by drug convictions. Many groups across the country are calling for legalization of various controlled substances, particularly marijuana.

1916: Movies are a very popular genre of entertainment. Each week, nearly thirty million Americans see black-and-white film comedies, documentaries, or full-length features. A film studio might gross as much as $3 million in a year, while top stars might receive weekly salaries of $3,000.

Today: Entertainment, particularly movies and music, is America's second leading export product behind the aerospace industry, grossing billions of dollars each year. A major motion picture might cost over $100 million to film and market, and its leading stars might receive salaries of $10-20 million or more. The most expensive film in Hollywood history is made in 1997. Titanic is a financial gamble at over $200 million but earns nearly $400 million in gross sales.

1916: In 1912 there are 900,000 automobiles registered in the United States. With the advent of the production innovations-in particular, the assembly line-automobile production increases drastically. By 1919 the number of cars registered soars to 6.7 million. The Model T is the most popular automobile, priced at $850 and available in a single color: black.

Today: The assembly of cars has become more complicated as automotive technology has grown more complex. In response to environmental protection laws, General Motors introduces the first all-electric car, theEVl, in 1996. Capable of traveling only a hundred miles between charges, and accelerating to only about 55 miles per hour, the cars are not immediately successful.

What Do I Read Next?

Trifles is an adaptation of "A Jury of Her Peers," a short story based on an actual trial Glaspell covered as a reporter in Des Moines, Iowa.

Other Glaspell plays include *The Outside, The Verge, Inheritors,* and *Alison's House*, which earned her the Pulitzer Prize in 1931.

John Millington Synge's *Riders to the Sea* is a well-written one-act mystery play. In Synge's play, the women of the Aran Islands watch helplessly as their husbands and sons sacrifice their lives to the sea as fishermen.

Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe by Fannie Flagg, is a novel chronicling the story of Idgie and Ruth, two women who fight sexism and racism in a small Alabama town in the 1930s.

Eugene O'Neill is one of the most recognized names in American drama, and certainly the most famous playwright to emerge from the Provincetown Players, the small amateur theater company Glaspell helped create in 1915. Like Glaspell, O'Neill wrote several one-act, "slice of life" plays that were first performed in Provincetown, including *Bound East for Cardiff, In the Zone, The Long Voyage Home*, and *The Moon of the Caribbees*.

Sandra Dallas's *The Diary ofMattie Spenser* is the fictional account, told in diary form, of an Iowa woman who weds in 1865. After her marriage, she travels with her husband to the Colorado Territories, builds a sod house, raises children, and encounters all the hazards of the nineteenth-century American wilderness.

Further Study

Ben-Zvi, Linda, editor. *Susan Glaspell: Essays on Her Theater and Fiction*, University of Michigan Press, 1995.

This useful collection includes sixteen essays examining several of Glaspell's plays and short stories. Four separate articles consider *Trifles* and "A Jury of Her Peers."

Egan, Leona Rust. *Provincetown as a Stage: Provincetown, the Provincetown Players, and the Discovery of Eugene O'Neill*, Parnassus Imprints, 1994.

Egan's account of the Provincetown Players. Chronicles the group's production of plays by some of the most famous American playwrights of the early "little theatre" movement, including Glaspell and Eugene O'Neill.

Jones-Eddy, Julie. *Homesteading Women: An Oral History of Colorado, 1890-1950*, Macmillan, 1992.

The author interviewed several women for this account of the American West seen through the eyes of frontier women who raised families, built and kept homes, and survived the harsh rural life of the Colorado Territories.

Riley, Glenda and Richard W. Etulain, editors. B*y Grit and Grace: Eleven Women Who Shaped the American West*, Fulcrum, 1997.

This collection of biographical essays includes profiles of well-known figures such as Annie Oakley and Calamity Jane, as well as civil rights activist Mary Ellen Pleasant and women's suffrage leader Abigail Scott Duniway.

Waterman, Arthur E. *Susan Glaspell*, Twayne Publishers, 1966.

A biography that chronicles Glaspell's early life as a Iowa reporter through her career as a playwright and novelist in New York and Massachusetts.

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Project Editor
David Galens

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

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

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

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

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

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

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The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Drama for Students

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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