# The Wedding Study Guide

## The Wedding by Nicholas Sparks (author)

BOOKRAGS

# Contents

# Introduction

*The Wedding* (2003) is Nicholas Sparks's sequel to his bestselling novel *The Notebook* (1996). *The Wedding* is narrated by Wilson Lewis, the son-in-law of Noah and Allie Calhoun (the primary characters in *The Notebook*). Wilson's absentminded neglect of his relationship with his wife, Jane, comes to a head when he forgets their twenty-ninth anniversary. Her response brings Wilson to the realization that Jane may no longer be in love with him. With some encouragement and inspiration from Noah, Wilson decides to re-court Jane in the hopes of rekindling some of the magic from early in their relationship.

In his ninth novel, Sparks returns to the character of Noah Calhoun from *The Notebook* as Wilson's confidant and counselor in matters of the heart. When Jane and Wilson's oldest daughter, Anna, announces that she and longtime boyfriend, Keith, want to get married in one week—on Jane and Wilson's thirtieth anniversary—Wilson finds the perfect opportunity to display his year-long romantic efforts to win Jane back. While both Jane and Wilson support the immediacy of the wedding given Noah's unstable health, Jane is not pleased with Anna's request for a no-frills wedding. Jane wants Anna to have a formal ceremony and reception—the kind of wedding she never had. Wilson helps Anna and Jane reach a compromise, and he plays an integral part in pulling the wedding together. He draws on his memories of how he first courted Jane as a guide to planning a wedding-to-remember for his daughter, and in the process shows Jane the man he wants to become.

# Author Biography

Nicholas Sparks was born in Omaha, Nebraska, on December 31, 1965. While he was growing up, his family lived in Nebraska and Michigan before settling in California, where he graduated high school as valedictorian in 1984. In 1985, as a freshman at Notre Dame, he broke the school record for the 4 × 800 relay in track. After suffering from a track-related injury, and at his mother's suggestion, he tried his hand at writing. He wrote a novel, but it was never published.

He married his wife Catherine in July of 1989 and they lived in Sacramento, California, while he worked at a number of jobs. He wrote another novel, which, like the first, was never published. In 1992, his job as a pharmaceutical salesman required a relocation to North Carolina, where he later wrote *The Notebook*. While it was not his first published novel—that was *Wokini: A Lakota Journey to Happiness and Self-Understanding*, written with Billy Mills (1990)—*The Notebook* (1996) was the first novel that garnered widespread recognition for Sparks.

Sparks drew inspiration for his writing from his family hardships. His next novel, *Message in a Bottle* (1998) was inspired by the untimely death of his mother from a horseback riding accident in 1989. His father also died prematurely in a car accident in 1996 at age fifty-four. *A Walk to Remember* (1999), was inspired by Sparks's younger sister, Danielle, who had brain cancer. In 2000, shortly after its publication, she died at age thirty-three.

Following *A Walk to Remember, The Rescue* (2000), was inspired by Sparks's struggle to help his son, who was incorrectly diagnosed with autism. Novels that followed include *A Bend in the Road* (2001), *Nights in Rodanthe* (2002), and *The Guardian* (2003). *The Wedding*, also published in 2003, was written as a sequel to *The Notebook. Three Weeks with My Brother* (2004) is a nonfiction chronicle written with his brother, Micah Sparks, about their around-the-world trip that helped them process the emotional strain of their recent family tragedies.

Sparks is the author of eleven novels, with the publication of *At First Sight* (2005). Sparks is a major donor to the creative writing department at the University of Notre Dame, where his contributions support scholarships, fellowships, and internships. As of 2005, Sparks lives with his wife and five children in North Carolina.

# Plot Summary

## Prologue

The prologue begins with Wilson asking the question, "Is it possible, I wonder, for a man to truly change? Or do character and habit form the immovable boundaries of our lives?" Wilson identifies the catalyst to his renewed efforts to energize his relationship with his wife: he forgot their twenty-ninth anniversary. He sees this incident as the culmination of the many years he has taken his marriage for granted. While he loves Jane just as much as when they first married, he also recognizes that Jane may not feel the same way. Wilson presents the reader his story, relating the events and emotions of the previous fourteen months, beginning with the missed anniversary.

## Chapter 1

Chapter 1 explores the current state of Wilson and Jane's relationship. Wilson considers the personality differences of Jane, himself, and their three children, Anna, Joseph, and Leslie. He acknowledges that most of the child-rearing responsibilities have always fallen on Jane's shoulders and now that the children are grown, he feels that Jane knows them much better than he does. Anna, the oldest, works for her local newspaper and has dreams of becoming a fiction writer. Joseph is a social worker at a battered women's shelter. Leslie, the youngest and still in college, is studying biology and physiology with the hopes of becoming a veterinarian.

Shortly after the missed anniversary, Jane announces to Wilson that she wants to visit Joseph in New York for a couple of weeks, alone. Wilson realizes that his marriage is in a state of crisis, and he visits his father-in-law Noah Calhoun to chat and get some relationship advice. To Wilson, Noah is the authority on how to make a marriage work. The romance between Noah and his late wife, Allie, has taken on almost mythic proportions in the family consciousness. After talking with Noah, Wilson "knew what [he] had to do."

## Chapter 2

Wilson resolves to court Jane as if they were first starting to date. However, he is not sure why she fell in love with him to begin with. He is not a very romantic guy; he's too practical. He recalls some of his attempts to re-court Jane in the months after the forgotten anniversary, such as cooking fancy meals for her and working off some extra weight. He then explains an important event that occurs just as the thirtieth anniversary nears. Anna bursts through the front door and announces that she and longtime boyfriend, Keith, want to get married in one week, on Jane and Wilson's thirtieth anniversary.

## Chapter 3

Wilson thinks back on how he and Jane first met, the first time he told Jane he loved her, their first home, and how their relationship developed. Wilson mentions compromises that they both made early in their relationship: Jane settled for a simple civil ceremony instead of a wedding in a church followed by a big reception; Wilson moved to New Bern. Wilson sees the importance that Jane puts on Anna's wedding as a reflection of the regrets she has about their wedding.

## Chapter 4

Wilson visits Noah at Creekside, the nursing home where he now resides. His wife, Allie, has passed away, and now Noah spends most of his time by the pond. Wilson finds Noah sitting on a bench feeding a particular swan, his copy of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* lying beside him. Noah loves Whitman's poems, and he has a strong attachment to this particular copy of *Leaves of Grass*; the book itself had comforted him during his military service and had even taken a bullet for him during World War II. Noah has a strong attachment toward the swan, but the narrative does not yet reveal the reason for this attachment, other than to say that it causes the doctors to think Noah is delusional. Noah recalls a special moment when he and Allie had first reunited after being apart for fourteen years; they took a canoe out onto a lake filled with swans. Noah explains how Allie was always fascinated by swans because of their lifelong devotion to their mates. Wilson has heard this and other stories of Noah and Allie's relationship many times before, told by both Jane and Noah. He understands their importance. When Wilson returns home, he reflects on the ways he has failed Jane in their marriage, with what he terms "innocent neglect."

## Chapter 5

The wedding plans now underway allow Wilson an opportunity to express his love for Jane in a tangible way. During the week of planning, Wilson makes an elaborate dinner for Jane to help her relax. She comes home very excited that one of her favorite photographers happens to be available for Anna's wedding. When Jane expresses concern about the cost of the wedding, Wilson, a characteristically frugal man, assures her not to worry. She cannot believe her ears. As they are giggling and joking, Wilson thinks back to their first date. He had made reservations at an expensive restaurant, but they lost their reservation because they were delayed helping a stray dog find its owner. As Wilson's mind returns to the present, the easy mood between him and Jane breaks down into awkwardness. He then brings up when he asked Noah for Jane's hand in marriage. This is the segue to Wilson's proposal that they should have Anna's wedding at Noah's house. Jane agrees.

## Chapter 6

As Wilson takes care of more wedding plans, he thinks back to the first time Jane told him about her parents' legendary relationship. Wilson continues to run errands for the wedding, stops by to see Noah, and then meets up with the landscapers at Noah's house. Later, Jane tells Wilson how exasperated she is with Anna because Anna can't seem to make up her mind about anything—she seems to be just going along with whatever Jane likes. On top of that, Jane is fretting about the caterer. Wilson assures her that he will take care of everything. He feels some of the old magic of their relationship returning.

## Chapter 7

Wilson is making dinner for Jane when she returns home. As they chat about their respective days, Wilson remembers how worried he was returning to law school at Duke for his last year, being concerned that Jane would meet someone else while they were in separate cities. Wilson mentions to Jane that he wishes there had been time for Keith to ask him for Anna's hand in marriage, as he found the experience of asking Noah for Jane's hand quite character building. Wilson thinks back on how he proposed to Jane, and the two of them go for an evening walk. There is a brief and tense discussion of Noah's attachment to the swan, but the details are withheld from the narrative.

## Chapter 8

Wilson arranges for the Chelsea, Jane's favorite restaurant, to cater the wedding. Jane is extremely pleased. Wilson thinks back to five days after he and Jane were married, when Jane requested that Wilson go to church with her and later pray with her, even though he was an atheist. He remembers her saying that she made compromises for him, like having a secular civil ceremony, and now she needed him to do this for her. This memory fuels Wilson's determination to make Anna's wedding great. Jane's sister calls and informs Wilson that Noah is in the hospital.

## Chapter 9

Noah has tripped on a root near the pond and hit his head. Jane and Wilson rush to the hospital and meet up with Jane's siblings. When Noah is finally allowed visitors, he first asks for Wilson, alone. Wilson knows why; he is the only one who is sympathetic to Noah's belief that the swan is Allie reincarnated, and Noah wants him to feed her while he is in the hospital. While Wilson is not convinced that the swan is Noah's reincarnated wife, it doesn't bother him to indulge Noah. Later that evening, Wilson apologizes to Jane for how absent he's been from their marriage. Jane tells Wilson why she married him and why she loves him; his willingness and ability to provide so well for the family has always meant a lot to her.

## Chapter 10

Wilson comes back from a morning walk to find that Jane has made breakfast. Anna comes to the house and whispers to Wilson that she cannot wait until the wedding. It seems as though there might be more to the wedding than meets the eye. Anna and Jane leave for Raleigh and Greensboro to shop for a wedding dress. As the girls prepare to leave, Wilson and Jane share a romantic kiss in the driveway.

## Chapter 11

When Wilson goes by the nursing home to feed the swan, she isn't interested in food. Reluctantly, Wilson talks to the swan, explaining that Noah is going to be fine. He is surprised to see the swan suddenly begin eating. Wilson later visits Noah in the hospital and brings him his treasured copy of *Leaves of Grass*. Wilson leaves to check on the wedding preparations and reminisces about the kiss he and Jane shared earlier in the day.

## Chapter 12

Wilson is re-courting Jane in the same fashion that he courted her in their first year of marriage. He remembers how building their first house had taken a toll on her, and in order to speed up the process, he secretly hired a crew to work on the house and kept Jane away from it during the last week of building. He then surprised her with the finished house, much sooner than she thought it would be ready. In the same way, he keeps Jane away from Noah's house while it is undergoing the wedding renovations so he can surprise her with its transformation. Jane calls to tell Wilson that she is going to stay overnight in Greensboro because Anna cannot make up her mind about a wedding dress. Wilson day dreams about the kiss they shared earlier and thinks that perhaps things are changing for the better between them.

## Chapter 13

Wilson is overseeing the sweeping landscaping renovations at Noah's house. The neighbor, Harvey Wellington, a pastor and longtime friend, makes the remark that he is glad that the house is being tended to. He says, "the more special something is, the more people seem to take it for granted." Wilson knows that he has taken Jane and their love for each other, like the house, for granted too long. He later visits Noah at Creekside now that he is back from the hospital. They discuss the landscaping work being done at the house and the almost mythic rose garden Noah constructed for Allie early in their marriage, in the shape of five concentric hearts. The family believes that the rose garden was one big gift of love for Allie. Noah tells Wilson the real story. He made the first heart when their first child was born, and kept adding to it with each child. When one of their children died at age four, the garden made Allie too sad to look at; she even asked Noah to mow it down. He didn't act on the onetime request—he was

not sure she really meant what she said. The rose garden lived on as a gift both beautiful and sad for Allie. Later that night, Wilson and Jane share a pizza just as they used to in their youth. Jane startles Wilson by asking him if he is having an affair. She is a bit bewildered by his recent expressions of love and wonders what his motive is. Wilson assures her that he is not having an affair. He adds that he wants to prepare a little anniversary surprise for her the next night because the day of their anniversary will be too busy with the wedding.

## Chapters 14-15

Wilson continues to oversee the renovation at Noah's house and anticipates the secret he has in store for Jane. The next night, Wilson posts a note on their front door telling Jane that a surprise awaits her inside. Jane enters their house, and Wilson has left candles, music, and little notes everywhere, leading her upstairs where he has left special bath oils and a new dress. The notes instruct her that after she gets ready for the evening, she will be blindfolded in a limousine that will pick her up and drive her to a destination where he will be waiting.

## Chapter 16

The limo takes Jane to Noah's house, where Wilson has prepared more surprises. Wilson lets her remove the blindfold for her to see, for the first time, the magnificence of Noah's renovated house and grounds. Jane is speechless. Wilson instructs Jane to go upstairs to her old room where another surprise awaits her. Wilson has put together an album consisting of pictures of the two of them; beneath each picture Wilson has written what he was thinking when each photo was taken. Jane comes downstairs, visibly moved. Jane tells Wilson how she remembers her parents always dancing in the kitchen. Wilson and Jane dance for awhile, then, moved by the romantic evening, go upstairs and make love.

## Chapter 17

The next day, Wilson and Jane are in town having lunch when they get a call from Jane's sister Kate that something has happened, and Noah is extremely upset. They go to Creekside to find out that the swan is gone. It is not clear whether Noah questions his belief that the swan is Allie in the first place, or if he thinks that the swan and therefore, Allie, has left him. After things settle down a bit and Kate leaves, Noah gives Jane and Wilson his copy of *Leaves of Grass* as an anniversary gift. Later that evening, Jane gives Wilson an anniversary gift of cooking lessons in Charleston. They agree to take them together.

## Chapter 18

The wedding day has finally arrived. The hired help and the family start arriving. Joseph pulls Wilson aside and tells him how surprised and delighted he is about Wilson's efforts to win back Jane's love in the past year. Joseph confesses to Wilson how upset Jane had been when she visited him in New York alone after the forgotten anniversary a year earlier. Consequently, Joseph only reluctantly helped Wilson with his anniversary gift to Jane. The wedding ceremony is about to begin. Anna comes down the stairs, not in her bridal gown, but in a bridesmaid dress, holding a veil behind her back. Now the real surprise is revealed—the wedding had been a surprise for Jane all along. Jane is the bride, not Anna, and this is the wedding Jane always wanted but never had. Wilson had been preparing the wedding for a year so that it would be a surprise. The amazing coincidences that a first-class caterer, musician, and photographer had all been available on such short notice were actually planned well in advance. After the wedding, Wilson finds Noah down at the river. The swan has found her way to the river right by the house, presumably to be with the family for the wedding. Wilson now believes that the swan is Allie.

## Epilogue

Wilson concludes that a man can truly change if he really wants to. He is going to keep up his romantic gestures to show Jane how much he loves her every day, not just once a year.

# Characters

## Dr. Barnwell

Dr. Barnwell is Noah's doctor. He is like a member of the family, as he has been taking care of Noah for years; however, he is concerned about Noah's mental health. He thinks Noah is delusional because Noah believes a swan is his dead wife, Allie.

## Allie Calhoun

Allie Calhoun is Noah's wife and Jane's mother. Allie is not an actual living character in *The Wedding*, but she is referred to throughout the novel. Her love story with Noah is legendary within the Calhoun family, and serves as an inspiration for Wilson to win back the affections of his wife. Noah believes that Allie has been reincarnated as a swan at the pond near his nursing home, since she had been fascinated by swans.

## Noah Calhoun

Noah Calhoun is Jane's father. His love story with his wife, Allie, is chronicled in Sparks's novel *The Notebook* and is referenced throughout *The Wedding*. In *The Wedding*, Noah's romantic reputation is held up as an ideal that Jane and her siblings aspire to in their own relationships. Wilson, Jane's husband, sees him as an authority on the subject of marriage and seeks advice from Noah, who acts as Wilson's confidant in matters of the heart. Noah relates many stories of his relationship with Allie to Wilson to help him put his own troubles in perspective. Noah misses Allie terribly; though she died five years before the novel's action begins, he does not feel that she is gone completely. He believes she has come back in the form of a swan at a nearby pond. Indeed, the swan seems to express human emotions such as concern, love, and devotion, and never leaves the pond regardless of the weather. Noah carries a battered copy of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* as a reminder of his love for Allie. He maintains a good sense of humor despite his age and precarious health.

## Kate

Kate is Jane's sister. She calls Jane and Wilson when Noah is taken to the hospital after he trips on a root and hits his head. The sisters fuss and fawn over their father and disapprove of his belief that Allie has been reincarnated as a swan.

## Harold Larson

Harold Larson was a law school student at Duke University with Wilson. Harold and his girlfriend, Gail, serve as a foil to Wilson and Jane. Wilson remembers how Harold's

breakup with Gail had made him worry about his own relationship with Jane. He was worried that, like Gail, Jane might meet someone else while he was away in law school and she was teaching in New Bern.

## Anna Lewis

Anna Lewis is Jane and Wilson's oldest child. She is twenty-seven years old and works at the local paper with the hopes of someday becoming a novelist. She announces in Chapter 2 that she and boyfriend, Keith, want to get married in one week, on Jane and Wilson's thirtieth anniversary. Jane is surprised, but Wilson has come to expect that Anna will do things her own way and according to her own timing. Anna is a freethinker; she dresses all in black and is very opinionated. While she usually likes to have her own way, when it comes to the wedding, she does not seem to make up her mind about anything. She merely agrees with everything Jane suggests, which exasperates and confuses Jane. At the end of the novel, it becomes clear why she has taken such an uncharacteristically indecisive attitude to the wedding. Anna plays a significant role in helping Wilson pull together his surprise for his and Jane's thirtieth anniversary.

## Jane Lewis

Jane Lewis is the wife of Wilson Lewis and the daughter of Noah and Allie Calhoun. Wilson describes the young Jane as being beautiful with a long ponytail, and even when she is middle-aged, he finds her extremely attractive. According to Wilson, Jane is gregarious, organized, warm, and expressive. She was responsible for most of the child rearing as the kids were growing up, and by the time the children left home, she and Wilson were leading separate lives and they found it difficult to relate to each other. When Wilson forgets their twenty-ninth anniversary, she becomes extremely upset. It is apparent to Wilson that Jane feels that this is yet another moment when Wilson has disappointed her. Her perfunctory response to Wilson's after-the-fact anniversary gift of perfume indicates the despair she feels about the state of her marriage. Consequently, she visits their son, Joseph, for a couple of weeks, her first trip without Wilson. During this trip, Jane confides to Joseph about how upset she is with the state of her marriage. For the most part, she hides these feelings from Wilson, although Wilson understands that he must do something drastic to save the marriage. While Jane is initially suspicious of Wilson's motives—she accuses him of having an affair—she comes to appreciate the measures he takes to save their marriage.

## Joseph Lewis

Joseph Lewis is Jane and Wilson's only son, who works in New York City as a social worker in a women's shelter. Early in the novel, Wilson describes his relationship with Joseph as being somewhat distant, although they have good conversations. Joseph becomes angry with Wilson when he learns of how Wilson had forgotten his and Jane's twenty-ninth anniversary. Jane visits Joseph after the forgotten anniversary, and Joseph

becomes her confidant about her marital problems. Because Joseph is quite displeased with Wilson, he is reluctant to be part of his thirtieth anniversary gift to Jane. Nonetheless, by the end of the novel, Joseph is proud of his father for rekindling the romance and working hard to improve his relationship with Jane.

## Leslie Lewis

Leslie Lewis is Jane and Wilson's youngest child. She is in college at Wake Forest, studying biology and physiology with the hopes of becoming a veterinarian. She is a romantic, and Wilson turns to her for help while planning his anniversary surprise for Jane. Leslie meets up with Anna and Jane in Greensboro to look for wedding dresses.

## Wilson Lewis

Wilson is the main character and narrator of the novel. He has forgotten his and Jane's twenty-ninth wedding anniversary. Now, fourteen months later, he explains how he rekindled the love in their marriage during the year that followed the forgotten anniversary. Wilson is a practical and unromantic man, an estate lawyer who is a creature of habit. He blames himself for his "innocent neglect" of the marriage which, over time, has left a huge chasm in his relationship with Jane. He is not sure how to relate to her anymore. When he forgets their twenty-ninth anniversary, it suddenly occurs to him that perhaps Jane doesn't love him anymore. Consequently, he resolves to try to win back her love. His journey takes a year, culminating on his and Jane's thirtieth anniversary. Over the course of this year, he remembers how he and Jane initially fell in love, and uses these memories as a guide to figure out what he needs to do to reignite Jane's interest in him. He often consults Jane's father, Noah, as a kind of spiritual guide in his quest to make Jane fall in love with him all over again.

## Nathan Little

Nathan Little is a landscaper who has helped Wilson over the years with various landscaping projects. He enlists Nathan's help to ready Noah's house for the wedding. With a team of landscapers, Nathan manages to make the grounds of Noah's house breathtakingly beautiful.

## John Peterson

John Peterson is the pianist at the Chelsea restaurant. He is also Anna's former piano teacher and plays the music for the wedding. Peterson has a soft spot for the Lewis family because Jane had taken a chance on him to give Anna piano lessons when he was relatively unknown in the town. Now that he is very well known and well regarded, Jane cannot believe that he is available on such short notice.

## Harvey Wellington

Harvey Wellington is a minister who lives next door to Noah and Allie, and has been a good friend of the family for a long time. He officiates at the wedding. When Harvey sees Noah's house being readied for the wedding he makes a comment about special things, like the house, often being taken for granted.

# Themes

## Love

*The Official Nicholas Sparks Web Site* identifies the theme of *The Wedding* as being "love and renewal," and it is addressed in several ways in the novel. Jane and Wilson's love is renewed through the year-long process of courting Jane all over again as he had done when they had first met. He loves his wife, but realizes his "innocent neglect" of their marriage may have made his wife fall out of love with him. When Wilson forgets his and Jane's twenty-ninth anniversary, this is the final straw that causes him to realize that he has not tended to his marriage for many years. He sees a sadness in Jane that indicates she has been unhappy in the marriage for some time. His challenge is to win back his wife's love by showing her how much he loves her. Ultimately, his memories of how he and Jane came to be in love in the first place serve as his guide to knowing how to court her all over again. Wilson discovers that like anything else, love requires constant attention and upkeep in order to keep it alive.

Additionally, the love between Wilson's father-in-law, Noah, and Noah's late wife, Allie, serves as a backdrop for the novel. Wilson sees Noah and Allie's marriage as the model that he should follow. When he expresses this sentiment to Noah, Noah reveals that he and Allie had their difficult times as well. Nonetheless, Noah's relationship with Allie, a love that is referenced throughout the novel, is seen as something that can overcome obstacles, even death. Noah's love for Allie is renewed after her death in his daily care of the swan. While it is not clear if the swan is indeed a reincarnated Allie, Noah's conviction reveals how his love for Allie is eternal, even after she is gone.

## Appearance and Reality

Noah and Allie's almost mythic relationship highlights the discrepancy between appearance and reality. While Noah believes ardently that the swan is Allie reincarnated, the doctors—and his children—believe this is evidence that Noah is losing his mind. The reader is never certain one way or the other, but Noah's reality brings him peace and comfort. Another example of appearance versus reality is the rose garden. For the family, Noah's present to Allie of a rose garden in the shape of five concentric hearts is an expression of ideal and true love, the work of a true romantic. The reality, Noah reveals later, is that the rose garden was five separate gifts, one heart for each child that was born. Consequently, the rose garden always held a certain sadness for Allie because one of their young children died. When she looked at the garden, she not only thought of Noah's love, but also of her dead child. What the family views as a monument to love was also, in reality, a reminder of a tragic loss.

The most dramatic example of appearance versus reality is revealed at the end of the novel when Jane, as well as the reader, learns that the wedding is not really Anna's wedding but Jane's—a surprise that Wilson has been planning for a year. What

appeared to be Anna's indecisiveness over wedding details was, in reality, her way of allowing Jane to pick her own favorites. During the preparation, Jane had believed that top-notch photographers, musicians, and caterers serendipitously had made cancellations the very weekend of the wedding. At the end of the novel, the truth is revealed that it was all Wilson's plan so Jane would be surprised, getting her dream wedding after all.

## Family and Family Life

The importance of familial relationships is central to *The Wedding*. Planning the wedding brings the family together and helps to mend not only Jane and Wilson's relationship, but also Wilson's relationship with his children. Joseph and Wilson's relationship becomes strained when Jane despairs after Wilson forgets their twenty-ninth anniversary. Joseph is skeptical of Wilson's efforts to enlist the family in planning Jane's thirtieth anniversary surprise. By the end of the novel, however, Joseph and Wilson's relationship is repaired as Joseph understands the efforts Wilson has made to win back Jane's love.

As the patriarch of the family, Noah is the person that the family seems to revolve around. Anxious that he will not live long, Anna requests a quick wedding. When Noah is rushed to the hospital, all his children gather in the waiting room for him, as well as for each other. As they huddle together, Wilson mentions that he understands that in such moments Jane needs the company of her siblings perhaps even more than she needs him. Likewise, when Noah regains his health, the family comes together as well. At the end of the novel, Wilson reveals how he could not have pulled off the wedding without his family helping him keep the surprise a secret.

## Change

Wilson opens the novel with this question: "Is it possible, I wonder, for a man to truly change?" This question generates Wilson's quest in the novel, as he is determined, whatever the answer, to change. It is not a desire for him, but a necessity. After the oversight of his anniversary, Wilson is afraid that he might have lost his wife forever as a result of the man that he has been: preoccupied, absent, and focused on work. The only way to repair his relationship with Jane and save his marriage is to change. He muses several times that he does not think he is the man that Jane wanted to marry, nor did he become the man he wanted to be. Because of this, Wilson must stretch himself beyond his comfort zone. He takes several weeks off from work, cooks dinner, suggests evening walks, and plans a romantic pre-anniversary evening for Jane. Once he begins to make Jane a priority, he finds it becomes easier to be the man she wants. The man who begins the novel is trapped by his feelings and fearful of losing his wife, but the man at the end of the novel has found something new in himself, and has emerged with a new outlook on life and his marriage. Indeed, he answers his own question: "Yes, I decided, a man can truly change."

# Style

## Anthropomorphism

The novel explores the concept of anthropomorphism through the swan that Noah believes to be Allie reincarnated. Anthropomorphism refers to animals resembling humans, either physically or emotionally. In a sense, the swan becomes a character in the novel, just as real as Wilson or Noah. For Noah, quite literally, the swan is Allie's way of being with him beyond the grave. The swan is attentive to Noah's voice and conversation, lies at his feet, looks after him after he hits his head, and even joins him for the wedding. By the end of the novel, even Wilson has also come to think that the swan is Allie. When he feeds the swan in Noah's absence, he is shocked to find that the swan will not eat until he actually tells her that Noah is okay. It appears that the swan is more than merely an animal presence, but Nicholas Sparks does not state definitively either way. Near the end of the novel, the swan disappears and Noah is extremely upset. It is not clear whether Noah doubts his conviction that the swan is Allie, or if he is just depressed that she is gone. When the swan shows up in the river near Noah's house, where the wedding is being held, Noah is immensely relieved. He believes the swan left the pond at Creekside to be with the family for the wedding. When Wilson sees the swan in the river after the wedding, he too believes the swan is Allie.

## Didacticism

A didactic literary work refers to a story whose purpose is to teach a lesson. Though the term is often applied to fairytales and fables, there is an instructive quality to *The Wedding* that suggests that there is a lesson to be learned. Wilson is telling this story from a distance of two months after the surprise wedding. Though he states in the prologue "a man can learn nothing by asking my advice" about marriage, it is clear that he thinks his experiences over the past fourteen months are worth telling—and learning from—otherwise, he would not be telling the story at all. Sparks's use of the first-person narrator suggests a "learn from my mistakes" point of view. But the lesson to be learned is not exclusive to men or husbands. The reader of *The Wedding* can learn many lessons: the power of love, the need to cherish what we love, and the ability to change if it is really desired.

## Flashback

A flashback in literature describes events that occur before the narrative beginning of the story. This entire novel is a flashback, framed by the prologue and epilogue that take place in October 2003. The core of *The Wedding* is written as Wilson's flashbacks to the early stages of his relationship with Jane, to the missed twenty-ninth anniversary, and to his attempts in the following year to become a more romantic person. Flashbacks in *The Wedding* provide the background of how Jane and Wilson's relationship first

developed so that the reader can understand how the relationship has atrophied over time. When readers see Wilson and Jane in their early dating and early marriage years in flashbacks, they are able to compare how the characters interacted then to how they interact now. Flashbacks often show the characters' motivations, and are used extensively in *The Wedding* to illustrate what Wilson misses about his marriage. They show the reader what he thinks about when he looks at Jane and how he knows what he must do to win back her love.

## Metaphor

A metaphor is a figure of speech that links the characteristics of one object to something seemingly unrelated. Noah's house is a metaphor for the state of Jane and Wilson's relationship. The home was once well loved and beautiful, but the garden and the house have been neglected for some time, resulting in its diminished beauty. A thick coat of dust covers everything inside and the pieces of furniture are covered with sheets so that they look like ghosts haunting the house. The roses in the garden have "grown wild" from neglect. When Wilson looks at them, he thinks there is "no way it could be salvaged except by pruning everything back and waiting another year for the blooms to return." This is similar to what he did with his relationship with Jane: after the debacle of the forgotten anniversary, Wilson pruned himself, cutting away the dead and withering things, and waited a year for the fruits of his labor—the wedding. With a little tending and care, the house resumes its former beauty. Likewise, Wilson's "innocent neglect" of his relationship to Jane caused them to drift apart, leaving their love not nearly as visible. With some care, Wilson is able to rekindle the romance with Jane, resulting in an energized marriage and a strengthened relationship.

# Historical Context

Nicholas Sparks began writing *The Wedding* in 2002. He wanted to write a sequel of sorts to *The Notebook* and also explore the idea of love being renewed. *The Wedding* is both written and set in North Carolina, the setting more specifically being the town of New Bern. The reader gets a sense of what New Bern is like in 2003 with the novel's vivid descriptions and inclusion of the famous restaurant, the Chelsea, and pianist John Peterson. Instead of fast-paced, big-city life, filled with modern technology, the pace of the novel is leisurely, much like the pace of the small town where the novel is set.

Sparks embraces what are considered to be traditional values: marriage, family, and spirituality. His values concerning marriage are reflected in this novel. Excerpted on the *Official Nicholas Sparks Web Site*, Sparks discusses how he expressed his views on marriage in *The Wedding* in a speech given in Lisbon in 2003:

I wanted to create a love story between a married couple, one in which the husband decides to court his wife all over again…. Marriage is both the most wonderful and frustrating experiences of most people's lives. No one's marriage is perfect, and no one's marriage is always easy. For these reasons, I find great nobility in people who work to improve their marriage and do their best to keep the romance in their marriage.

Set in twenty-first century America, where one in two marriages end in divorce, Sparks is espousing what is an almost radical idea: working on a marriage rather than giving up on it. Instead of a breakdown of the family unit, which has become common in contemporary America, in the novel, there are close relationships among family members; the family comes together both in times of joy and in times of crisis. Sparks's religious values are also evident in the novel. Jane opens Wilson up to becoming a Christian, even though he was raised an atheist. Wilson thinks fondly of how Jane asked him to go to church with her and how he and Jane prayed together for their first child.

Despite the traditional values of its main characters, *The Wedding* expresses a mixture of traditional gender roles and the changing concepts of gender. For example, Jane, a stay-at-home mom, typical for women in previous decades, had been the primary caregiver for their three children. Even after the children grow up and move out, Jane does not seek a full-time job. While Jane maintains a more traditional role in the family, Wilson breaks out of masculine gender roles of decades past. He learns how to cook sumptuous meals for Jane, becomes more romantic, and takes responsibility for solving their marital problems, roles that have previously been considered feminine.

# Critical Overview

*The Wedding* instantly became a bestseller upon its release in 2003. Fans of *The Notebook* flocked to bookstores for Sparks's long awaited sequel to the love story of Noah and Allie Calhoun. Readers who love his novels have expressed satisfaction with this installment of Sparks's view of love and life. However, those who find his novels too sugary-sweet and his characters unconvincing have expressed similar criticism about *The Wedding*. Nonetheless, even those who are nonplussed by Sparks's works in general do agree that *The Wedding* fulfills readers' expectations.

For the most part, critics who do not like the themes of Sparks's other novels, likewise do not like *The Wedding*. Critics such as Carmela Ciuraru of *The Washington Post* and Yvonne Crittenden from the Ontario *Windsor Star*, brand *The Wedding* as a sappy, unrealistic love story. Crittenden refers to the novel as a "saccharin novel about marriage [that] is the kind that gives 'chicklit' a bad name." Ciuraru concurs, saying that *The Wedding* "may test the patience of even the most ardent sentimentalists" and sees the character of Jane as one-dimensional. Other criticisms of Sparks's work, and *The Wedding* in particular, make the claim that his lackluster writing style makes the love story unconvincing. Reviewers like Dennis Lythgoe of Salt Lake City's *Deseret Morning News* as well as Ciuraru claim that flat characters and "pedestrian" prose make the conflict-resolution rather shallow. Those who do not like *The Wedding* seem to tire of its simplicity and predictability.

Interestingly, those who enjoy *The Wedding* seem to enjoy its predictability. Overall, *The Wedding*'s reception has been quite positive. Sparks openly admits that he has a formula, and this formula is clearly what his readers are looking for. Patricia Jones of the *Tulsa World* calls *The Wedding* "a slice of life readers will take to their hearts." She concludes that the novel is "for every woman and every man who is married or who contemplates being married in the future." A *Publishers Weekly* review makes the point that *The Wedding* clearly delivers what female readers want, a good love story that will make them hope their own partners could be a little more like Wilson. Ben Steelman, staff writer for Wilmington, North Carolina's *Star News*, notes that even though Sparks's novels have been criticized for being too simplistic and superficial, these kind of feel-good stories fulfill the expectations of Sparks's readers. Even Lythgoe, who criticizes the novel, goes on to call *The Wedding* "actually quite a good story" and concludes that "even with my criticisms, this seems like Sparks's best work." Sparks's novels clearly appeal to a large audience; several of his novels have been adapted to film with much success, perhaps due to this same formula.

# Criticism

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

# Critical Essay #1

*Issen is a high school English teacher as well as a college instructor of rhetoric and composition. In this essay, Issen considers the ways in which The Wedding articulates a new kind of masculinity that is in touch with traits previously considered feminine*.

Critic Ben Steelman of *Star News* terms *The Wedding* a didactic novel, teaching men how to treat their wives, "like one of those epistolary novels of the 1700s, which were supposed to teach the rising middle class in England and the colonies how to behave." However, neither the themes nor the writing style targets a male audience. Indeed most critics, and even Nicholas Sparks himself, acknowledge that his readership is largely female. Sparks is a novelist who openly acknowledges that he writes what he thinks his readers—mainly female—want to read. He expresses this view in an interview on *The Early Show* shortly after the publication of *The Wedding*. When Sparks is asked why he chose a male character rather than a female character to fix the relationship, he answers that he is giving his readers what they want:

First off, I think it's more realistic that the man would be the one who is less focused on the relationship in the long term. And that's a general statement. It's certainly not true for all marriages…. But I thought … [it] would seem more believable because if I wrote it—and I have a lot of women readers—and they say, 'Well, I'm already doing all of this stuff. We need to work on the husband.'

Sparks is appealing to the emotions of his female audience by addressing their relationship concerns, not necessarily the concerns of men. In fact, the way that the novel appeals to women reflects a changing concept of manhood—now in touch with both traits thought to be feminine as well as traits considered to be masculine.

A reviewer from Britain's *Mirror* remarks that the novel appeals to women and not so-called real men when he says "[s]elf-respecting blokes will balk at this unbelievably sentimental story. Make no mistake, it's strictly one for the ladies and, even then, only those who believe in fairytales." While this reviewer likely intended his comments to be negative, perhaps he is correct in inferring that *The Wedding* is a fairytale of sorts, one that appeals to a particular female audience. This female audience can clearly be characterized as belonging to the twenty-first century, when definitions of what is desirable in a man have shifted to embrace characteristics that were formerly considered to be feminine. The development of Wilson's romantic IQ in *The Wedding* highlights this new definition of masculinity. Consequently, the novel derives its appeal from its mixture of male perspective and female sensibility.

Traditional masculinity and femininity in much of the twentieth century were rigidly separated spheres. The man of the house worked to support his family, came home to supper already on the table, drank a cocktail or two, and then read the paper or watched television until it was time for bed. He took care of maintenance needs, made sure the family was provided for, and was discreet with his emotions.

The feminine sphere of the home often included housework, cooking, and raising the children. Women, wives, and mothers did not work outside of the home largely until the 1970s and 1980s. Their jobs, instead, were to keep a clean home, do the cooking, and manage the children and their activities. The woman was seen as the emotional core of the marriage and the family, the person everyone turned to for support and nurturing. The division of duties—both in the home and outside of it—along gender lines were traditional social institutions.

In the early twenty-first century, however, the sharp lines separating the traditionally masculine from the traditionally feminine began to blur. Women are now as strong a presence in the workplace as men, and it is not uncommon to hear of stay-at-home fathers who take on the duties of child-rearing and housework while their wives work. There has been a rise in men who participate in traditionally feminine rituals such as manicures, pedicures, and other grooming regimens, and a rise of households headed by single mothers and women who take on all the responsibilities of managing a family. Household duties between married couples are now commonly shared, and are not exclusively divided by the role of "husband" or "wife."

It is within this atmosphere of broadening cultural definitions of masculine and feminine that Wilson finds himself needing to make a change. And perhaps unlike generations before him, he is willing to consider both traditionally masculine and traditionally feminine sensibilities in order to achieve this change.

Wilson describes the problems in his relationship with Jane as stemming from his own "innocent neglect" of the marriage; quite simply, he has taken Jane for granted. Wilson's problem is often considered to be a stereotypically masculine response to relationships. In the first part of the novel, he explains how it has taken years of this "innocent neglect" to bring him and Jane to such a crisis in their relationship. As Wilson tries to remedy the situation in the months following the forgotten anniversary, he expresses an awkward, rather scientific way of addressing matters of the heart:

In January, for instance, I bought a cookbook and took to preparing meals on Saturday evenings for the two of us; some of them, I might add, were quite original and delicious. In addition to my regular golf game, I began walking through our neighborhood three mornings a week, hoping to lose a bit of weight. I even spent a few afternoons in the bookstore, browsing the self-help section, hoping to learn what else I could do. The experts' advice on improving a marriage? To focus on the four As—attention, appreciation, affection, and attraction. Yes, I remember thinking, that makes perfect sense, so I turned my efforts in those directions.

Sparks takes care to depict Wilson as a somewhat stiff, albeit open-minded middle-aged man. The methodical quality of Wilson's initial attempts to rekindle the romance between him and Jane shows Wilson to be a thoughtful and practical man, if perhaps a bit out of touch with his emotions. While he is open to seeking advice to help his marriage, it is not easy for him to express passion or romance. Sparks gives his reader some insight into what an emotionally awkward middle-aged man might be thinking in

such a circumstance—wanting to do something to improve his marriage, but not knowing where to start.

While Wilson seems incapable of fully expressing himself in the early part of the novel, when he later focuses on the relationship, he notices details about Jane that reveal a more sensitive man, perhaps one in touch with his feminine sensibilities. For instance, he notices the "painted toenails [that] peeked out beneath the hems," and "the way her hair caught the light; I smelled the faintest trace of the jasmine gel she'd used earlier." These observations contrast sharply with the awkward man represented earlier. Critic Yvonne Crittenden has noted that Wilson's solution is to become a "'metrosexual'—a man who's not gay but acts gay—i.e., gets in touch with his feminine side, believing that's what women want." While Crittenden does not think that many female readers would actually find this solution believable, it is clear that these passages are meant to appeal to an audience of women who would find this newfound sensibility attractive.

Furthermore, after a year of working to improve his marriage, Wilson surprises Jane with an evening that she has always wanted, a couple of nights before the wedding. As the evening unfolds, Wilson's newfound romantic side is revealed as he taps into his feminine sensibilities to come up with a suitable anniversary celebration. The way Wilson describes how he imagines Jane reading the little notes he has left her, taking in the candles, bath oils, lotion, new robe, new dress, wine, all leading up to a limousine taking her to meet him at Noah's newly spruced-up house, emphasizes why the novel appeals so much to a female audience. As one of the notes reads:

Is there anything better than a long hot bath after a busy day? Pick the bath oil you want, add plenty of bubbles, and fill the tub with hot water. Next to the tub you'll find a bottle of your favorite wine, still chilled, and already uncorked. Pour yourself a glass. Then slip out of your clothes, get in the tub, lean your head back, and relax. When you're ready to get out, towel off and use one of the new lotions I bought you. Do not dress; instead, put on the new robe and sit on the bed as you open the other gift.

This kind of evening appeals to the senses and to many women's idea of romance. It might seem unlikely, however, that most men would be able to identify with a woman enough to dream up such a celebration. Wilson, now a far cry from his early awkward days, is able to do just that; he draws on memories of what Jane had wished for on previous anniversaries—wishes that he did not then fulfill—and imagines how she must be feeling after a day of wedding planning.

The novel's climax emphasizes the fairytale quality of the plot. It occurs when Anna is walking down the stairs of Noah's house right before the wedding is to begin. In this moment, the secret is revealed: the wedding, Jane's wedding, is Wilson's thirtieth anniversary gift to her. As in a typical fairytale, the lovers get married, and everyone lives happily ever after. While readers may not be able to predict that the wedding is really for Jane, readers most certainly know that everything is going to work out for Jane and Wilson. And that is indeed what Sparks aims to do—give his readers a story that will make them happy because it has fulfilled their expectations. While it may not be believable to many that a middle-aged man would transform into a sensitive guy to save

a thirty-year marriage, such a story has strong appeal to women who wish such fairytales could come true.

**Source:** Laura Issen, Critical Essay on *The Wedding*, in *Literary Newsmakers for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2006.

# Critical Essay #2

*In the following interview with Haffenreffer, Sparks discusses the success of his books and their subsequent adaptations to film*.

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**Source:** David Haffenreffer, "Author Nicholas Sparks On *The Wedding*," in *CNN's The Biz*, September 15, 2003, p. 1.

# Critical Essay #3

In the following interview with Smith, the author offers an analysis of his two main characters.

Since 1996, author Nicholas Sparks has written seven best-sellers. He's had two of his novels turned into movies and has been named sexiest author—yeah—by *People* magazine. His latest book, *The Wedding*, is a love story that renews an affair from his first novel *The Notebook*. Nicholas Sparks is with us this morning.

Good morning.

Mr. NICHOLAS SPARKS (Author, *The Wedding*): Good morning. Thanks for having me back.

SMITH: Would you be anything other than a storyteller?

MR. SPARKS: These days, no. I don't think so. Simply because it's—it's what I do now, and I really like the process of—of creating stories. The writing is always a challenge, but actually coming up with stories, that parts—that—that's great.

SMITH: Yeah.

Mr. SPARKS: I mean, that—that's what I do.

SMITH: This story is—is—is melancholy in a way because it starts with the story of a man who forgets his wife's—their—his wife's …

Mr. SPARKS: Yeah.

SMITH: … their anniversary.

Mr. SPARKS: Right. Very sad.

SMITH: I mean, completely—this guy has not a clue.

Mr. SPARKS: Right.

SMITH: And what does he—what does he learn from that?

Mr. SPARKS: You know, its—I think he—he learns that he's taken his wife for granted. You know? He—he talks about this and this is really what the book is about, what gets him to this point. And he calls it a case of innocent neglect, you know. He wasn't a bad guy, he wasn't abusive. He wasn't addicted to drugs or anything. He just kind of took it for granted, and as he realizes that while he still loves his wife, because it was working well for him …

SMITH: Right.

Mr. SPARKS: … you know, maybe he hasn't been enough for—there enough for his wife.

SMITH: Yeah. He's a professional guy, he's a lawyer …

Mr. SPARKS: Right.

SMITH: … things are—you know …

Mr. SPARKS: Right.

SMITH: … from his perspective, all is well with the world. How does she see it?

Mr. SPARKS: Well, you know, it was OK for a while because she understood that, you know, because …

SMITH: Busy raising the kids.

Mr. SPARKS: … she's busy raising the kids and, of course, you have to have an income and he was doing that, so everything was great. And then once the kids are gone, it's—they realize how much they've drifted apart. But it's not necessarily that empty-nest syndrome. He talks that this has been a long time in the making.

SMITH: Yeah.

Mr. SPARKS: It's just the—he hasn't been the kind she's—he should have been the whole time in this marriage and he seats out to change that.

SMITH: Right. Now as an author …

Mr. SPARKS: Yeah.

SMITH: … do you write from personal experience?

Mr. SPARKS: Of course. Everything—everything I write is personal experience. You know, and I haven't been married forever. I've been married for 14 years but—and I don't know all the answers about marriage …

SMITH: Right.

Mr. SPARKS: … but—so I'll speak about mine. It goes through ups and downs. And it doesn't mean that when you're down you're thinking about divorce, it just means that you're not concentrating on each other way you should. You know—and there are times in life where that's important.

SMITH: Yeah.

Mr. SPARKS: If you have a sick child in the hospital, you know, that …

SMITH: That's the priority.

Mr. SPARKS: … that's the priority. You know, if you're moving, you know, you're doing that, that's the priority.

SMITH: Yeah.

Mr. SPARKS: And some couples are—if it's in one of these down phases, they're just good at going up, and others aren't.

SMITH: As you were writing this book, why did you choose—because you can make a choice. You could have said the man—the man can save the marriage, the woman can save the marriage.

Mr. SPARKS: Right.

SMITH: Why did you have the man save the marriage?

Mr. SPARKS: Well, that goes down to a number of different things about the type of books that I write …

SMITH: Right.

Mr. SPARKS: … and I think that—that it's more realistic, actually. First off, I think it's more realistic that the man would be the one who is less focused on the relationship the long term. And that's a general statement. It's certainly not true of all marriages.

SMITH: Right.

Mr. SPARKS: But I though that, you know, it would seem more believable because if I wrote it—and I have a lot of women readers—and they say, 'Well, I'm already doing all of this stuff. We need to work on the husband.' So …

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah. It's—I—it's—I think your style of writing is so interesting, because life in these books is pr—is kind of close to perfect, but it's not perfect. You know? The people who have the jobs are a little bit better than the jobs that you wish you had …

Mr. SPARKS: Right.

SMITH: … you know, and their lives are a little bit better than most of us really have. And it's—it's a kind of an interesting fantasy life, but it's just fraught with all these kind of real-life problems.

Mr. SPARKS: Right. Yeah. I—I, of course, draw on—you know, whenever I do these things, you know, I live a certain kind of life, you know? I live in a small Southern town and—and all of our friends are kind of like my wife, and I. You know, we all have little kids and we all have the same—we go to the soccer games on weekends. You know,

we do all these things and you learn that, you know, as great as things appear on the outside, there's all—everybody has …

SMITH: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mr. SPARKS: … everybody has—has stuff going on, and just every couple is different.

SMITH: And real quick, who are their in-laws?

Mr. SPARKS: Noah and Allie Calhoun.

SMITH: Bada-bing.

Mr. SPARKS: You know, bada-bing.

SMITH: There you go. If you want to know what's going on there—good to see you. Thanks for coming back.

Mr. SPARKS: Thanks, Harry.

**Source:** Harry Smith, "Nicholas Sparks discusses his new book *The Wedding*," in *CBS's The Early Show*, September 15, 2003, p. 1.

# Adaptations

- *The Wedding* was adapted to an audio book, read by Tom Wopat, in September 2003. It is available from Time Warner Audio Books on audio cassette and audio CD.
- *The Wedding* was adapted as an e-book in September 2003. It is available from Warner books in Adobe Reader and Microsoft Reader formats.

# Topics for Further Study

- Read the novel or watch the film version of *The Notebook* and consider the development of the character of Noah Calhoun. Do the accounts of him in both books seem to be the same character? Why or why not? What differences are there? In what ways has Allie's death affected Noah's outlook on life? Write a paper that compares and contrasts the depiction of Noah in both works.
- Nicholas Sparks's novels represent North Carolina in great detail. Find two of the following: a tourist guide, a tourist website, or a photography book that depicts small-town North Carolina. What aspects of North Carolina does Sparks focus on? Compare the ways that New Bern is represented in *The Wedding* with how it is portrayed in the tourist guides and the photography books. Which representation is more attractive or interesting to you? Why? Report your findings on a chart in which you identify and explain the similarities and differences in the representations.
- Review some of the poems contained in *Leaves of Grass* and choose three poems that you imagine might be especially meaningful to Noah, and explain why. Find passages in *The Wedding* to support your points. With your findings, write a letter to Wilson and Jane from Noah's perspective in which he explains how the poems affected his life and why he loves them so much.
- Sparks has openly discussed the autobiographical nature of his novels. His family has experienced several tragedies that he has woven into his fiction. Read *Three Weeks with My Brother*, a nonfiction account about a trip with his brother, Micah, and compare the ways that he discusses tragedy and grief in that book and in *The Wedding*. What aspects of loss and grief are depicted in the novel? What aspects are depicted in the nonfiction work? Which is more powerful to you and why? Write an essay in which you compare passages from *The Wedding* with passages from *Three Weeks with My Brother*, concluding the paper with your opinion about which genre more effectively depicts loss and grief.

# What Do I Read Next?

- *The Notebook* (1996) is the book to which *The Wedding* is the sequel. *The Notebook* is the story of Allie and Noah Calhoun's relationship, which opens with Noah reading to an ailing Allie with flashbacks to 1932 when they first meet and 1946, when they reunite.
- *Three Weeks with My Brother* (2004) is a nonfiction account of the worldwide trip that Sparks and his brother, Micah, took to reconnect after suffering several family tragedies.
- In *The Rescue* (2001), Sparks tells the story of Denise Holden, a single mother who falls in love with Taylor McAdden, a fireman who helps rescue her son when her car crashes during a storm. Taylor must deal with his past before he can fully give his love to Denise. Sparks mentions that this novel was inspired by his struggles to help his son deal with what they thought was autism but was later found to be a misdiagnosis.
- Sparks's *A Walk to Remember* (1999) tells the story of Jamie, a teenager who is not very popular but knows herself very well. She and Landon, an unlikely pair, fall in love, despite Jamie's cancer. Jamie's faith and inner strength change Landon forever. Sparks mentions that his sister, who died of cancer at age thirty-three in 2000, was the inspiration for this novel.
- *Suzanne's Diary for Nicholas* (2003), by James Patterson, is the story of how a woman comes to understand her boyfriend who abruptly leaves her by reading the diary of his belated first wife.
- *Wedding Season* (2004), by Darcy Cosper, presents a character on the opposite end of the marriage spectrum from Wilson and Jane. Joy must endure a summer full of her friends' weddings while defending her decision not to get married herself to her longtime boyfriend, Gabe.
- Jan Karon's *A Common Life: The Wedding Story* (2002), part of her "Beloved Mitford" series, also takes place in a small North Carolina community. It is the story of how Father Timothy Kavanagh and Cynthia Coppersmith fell in love and planned a memorable wedding.

# Further Study

Chung, Winnie, Interview with Nicholas Sparks, in *South China Morning Post*, April 10, 1999, p. 4.

Winnie Chung interviews Nicholas Sparks about his opinion of the film adaptations of his novels as well as the autobiographical nature of his stories.

Lacy, Bridgette A, "Tour the N.C. of Authors' Imaginations," in *The News and Observer* (Raleigh), May 22, 2005, p. 100.

This article discusses how North Carolina has been an inspiration for Nicholas Sparks's novels as well as the novels of mystery writer Margaret Maron.

Lisovicz, Susan, Interview with Nicholas Sparks, on *The Biz*, September 24, 2002.

In this interview with Nicholas Sparks, he discusses how Hollywood has adapted several of his novels to film. He discusses how his love stories, like his experiences in life, are mixed with sadness.

Rozenfeld, Monica, "Famous Author Tells of Life, Love That Influenced Works at Rutgers," in the *Daily Targrum*, November 15, 2004.

Monica Rozenfeld, a reporter for the Rutgers newspaper, reports on a speech that Nicholas Sparks gave at the school about his life as a writer.

Gibson, Charles, Interview with Nicholas Sparks, on *Good Morning America*, June 28, 2004.

In Charles Gibson's interview with Nicholas Sparks, Gibson discusses the film adaptation of *The Notebook*.

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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

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

**Manufacturing**
Stacy Melson



*For more information, contact*
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
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**Introduction**

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) 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, NfS 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

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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 NfS 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 NfS 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 NfS 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 NfS 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

NfS 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 Novels 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 NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS 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 Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels 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 NfS 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." Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

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

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on "Winesburg, Ohio." Novels 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 NfS, 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 Novels 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 NfS, 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 Novels 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, Novels for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331–3535