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Trifles is a one-act play by Susan Glaspell. Her short story, "A Jury of Her Peers", was adapted from the play a year after its debut. It was first performed by the Provincetown Players at the Wharf Theatre in Provincetown, Massachusetts on August 8, 1916. In the original play, Glaspell played the role of one of the characters, Mrs. Hale. It is frequently anthologized in American literature textbooks.

The play begins as the county attorney, the sheriff, Mr. Hale, Mrs. Peters, and Mrs. Hale enter the Wright's empty farm house. On prompting from the county attorney, Mr. Hale recounts his visit to the house the previous day, when he found Mrs. Wright behaving strangely and found her husband upstairs with a rope around his neck, dead. Mr. Hale notes that, when he questioned her, Mrs. Wright claimed that she was fast asleep when someone strangled her husband.

Often hailed as one of the quintessential feminist plays, 'Trifles' earned Glaspell a Pulitzer Prize and renewed literary recognition.

Trifles Details

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From Reader Review Trifles for online ebook

Julie H. says

This one-act play was written in 1916 and is believed to be based on an actual Iowa murder case that Glaspell investigated as a young reporter. Set in a late 19th/early 20th-century agricultural community, the big strong important men investigate the unexplained demise of bully husband John Wright while the female neighbors come to check on the household after Minnie Wright (John's widow) is taken in for questioning. The women's concerns are summarily dismissed by the men, however, using their intuition, women's knowledge and common sense they quickly unravel the so-called mystery behind the death. Patronized, condescended to, and insulted by the men who dismiss their questions and concerns as childish "trifles," the women decide not to share what they have learned.

Rachel says

I thought Trifles was a good short and sweet play, a lot happens in it in a brief time. It's like a mini mystery novel that shows how women tend to have a understanding with each other when it comes to marital problems and how men are blind to them. I also love how Minnie, the farmers wife, isn't in the play with dialog, but she feels like the main character and you get to know what she is like and what she went through.

Andrea says

I love this story because of the feminine undertone. We have men who think that they know everything and woman are just simple and only worry about simple things like "trifles" and can not think as complex as a man. But what the women in the story find out and do it more complex then any of these simple men in the story would ever understand!

Brad says

A neighbour walks into a home and finds the man of the house sitting on his La-Z-Boy, drinking a beer and staring listlessly into space. She asks him if she can see his wife, and he says she's still in bed. She points out that it's almost evening, and he simply repeats that his wife's in bed. She asks if she can go check on her, and when she gets no answer she heads up stairs to check on the wife. But the wife is dead, obviously strangled, so she leaves the house and calls the police. They come and arrest the man, and later she discovers that the husband and wife's cat is dead -- strangled.

Now from the neighbour's perspective, it is clear that the wife was a cold woman, a hard woman, a woman who wasn't fond of company and who kept her husband, a man who couldn't work due to an injury, outside of social company due to her own discomfort. The wife had even gone so far as to cancel the internet because she didn't want him wasting time on social websites when he could be doing something

"constructive at home." And finally, possibly, she strangled the husband's cat, which was his only friend, because it continued to scratch at the furniture and destroy the things she worked hard for. So he killed her.

I'm guessing there aren't many, under these circumstances, who would think that the man strangling his wife was justified. I am sure there are people who would empathize with his plight, sympathize with him for his situation, even suggest that his punishment should be less due to his circumstances, but I would be shocked if anyone felt his actions were justified.

Turn it around, however, make the wife the killer, change the cat to a canary, and set it in a time when the telephone (the social tool disallowed) was newer than the internet, and reactions are very different. A goodly number of people feel that Mrs. Wright's killing of her husband in Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* is entirely justified. Much of this has to do with the weight of inequality that has amassed for women over the years, but at least some of it has to do with the way we value the lives of humans (in descending order: children, women, men), and a little bit has to do with revenge.

Fascinating...no matter what your feelings may be about the subject.

Trifles is a play that I would love to see modernized, but even in its original form it is worth reading and talking about. I need to use it in class again soon.

Tweety says

I'm glad this was short, because I have decided that mysteries written as plays are not my thing. It was well written, however, I found it hard to really get into the tale. Yes, I felt the cold, and I felt to gloom. But as for the characters, I just didn't connect to them. Maybe because we were just told about some of them and never actually met them? Whatever the case, I can't say that I'll ever retread this. The only characters that felt real were Mrs. Peters and the Country Attorney. The mystery wasn't figured out by me till the major clue was found, then it was quite simple. Not a bad play, just not for me.

Claire says

this isn't a feminist manifesto. this isn't an expose of man's perpetual undermining of the female sex and its weaknesses. this isn't friedan, or woolf, or wollstonecraft. it doesn't go that deep in the direction of modern feminism, because that's not what it's about. it's about human nature and innocent complicity, and how easily things can be hidden under the veil of domesticity. it holds more if you don't look at it through only this perspective. if you step back, away from gender politics for a second, away from our contemporary bias, it is, and represents, so much more.

this is a drama, a very short one. my guess, if you enhance the dramatic interludes between dialogue and revelations, it'll top out at 30ish minutes as a production. reading it takes much less time (if you're not taking notes like me), but the story is so chillingly executed and deeply intriguing, you wish it could be longer. it's almost like things move too fast, too much exposition is given at once, and what was once an insignificant piece of the puzzle (a "trifle") suddenly, threateningly, becomes the most important thing, and there's something mildly disappointing with realizing the faster you read the closer you get to the end. (the same feeling, I would imagine, in watching the performance.) you want more, but with more would come

tediousness; it would become a police procedural, tv detectives coming out of the wings to interrogate the shaken wife and redneck neighbor, culminating in a stark confession or shootout in the streets at the end of 45 minutes + commercials. the best, and most frustrating, thing about trifles is the power in its length.

sure, you can read between the lines of the women's casual judgments and relations to the unseen wife of the freshly murdered man, analyze and come to an understanding that this was obviously glaspell's way of dissing the societal system in which women are meant to be little more than cooks, cleaners, mothers, and wives, even when it becomes a matter of life and death, but I don't think that's the only theme to this play. if anything, antigone, or really anything ibsen ever wrote, are better examples of early feminism in drama than this. the main evidence to the feminism argument is that, presumably (because we are only ever given some of the information, never all, and never without bias or commentary), the aforementioned doomed husband was murdered by his now potentially doomed wife after suppressing her dreams and desires for the decades they've been married. (she was a chorus girl when they met, he made her stop singing, etc. etc.) the women (the wives of the sheriff and neighbor/witness) find a broken birdcage in the messy kitchen (after a few sympathetic remarks over "couldn't she have cleaned up before getting arrested?"), and then the corpse of a bird whose neck has been wrung hidden beneath scraps of fabric in mrs. wright's sewing box: this, of course, is supposed to represent the suffocation of life that she had been feeling under the "wings" of her husband, who similarly had his neck wrung the night before, and in bed nonetheless. yes, these could be (and probably are) explicit and heavily symbolic parallels to the role of women in society at the time, and the burgeoning independence movement which was becoming stronger and stronger every day, but they are not as interesting, imho, as the story itself, and are most definitely not the only thing to be taken from this play.

it's a murder mystery first, then, sort of, a commentary on the future of feminism. it's a fascinating, spellbinding, relatively unsolved crime story that feels--no, is--scarily real, 1916 and before and after.

Bob says

This play is often hailed as an icon for feminist writing in which men often belittle anything associated with women. The men in the play look only for concrete evidence within their limited parameters. On the other hand, the women would consider the emotional and personal aspects of the murder case into account. The women tried to put themselves in the murderer's shoe, so to speak. As such, the women quickly find the motive and evidence of the murder --which was the whole point of the characters' visit to the scene. Meanwhile the men fuss all around the house and fail to find any evidence for the case since their prejudice and lack of respect of women's 'trifles' narrow their views.

People usually stop their analysis of the significance of the story there. But, I would argue that the story means much more than that. Trifles shows the whole world of the subtle but real interplay between one's prejudices and the blind spots that they produce, be it in terms of communication skills, social awareness and even international politics. The same message can be applied to the analysis of issues in colonization-decolonization, 'interracial' relations and so many other topics in which power and the trifling of the "other" ones are involved.

The play is as relevant today (and even in the future) as in the day it was penned. Whenever groups of people feel so shielded and so right in their own world that they can't empathize with people of different walks of life, they're reenacting the scenes of Trifles.

Ellen says

Also written by Glaspell as a short story, "A Jury of her Peers," which I don't like nearly as well. There's a lovely film 1980 film version, which though entitled "A Jury of her Peers," follows the staging and script of the one-act play, *Trifles*.

Glaspell's cleanly-scripted drama, plays on the idea that men and women speak different languages and perceive different realities. In the midst of a murder investigation at a rural farmhouse, the men - seeking the facts, trying to determine the motive - march upstairs to scrutinize the crime scene. Meanwhile, they miss the subtle clues the two women are able to "read" downstairs as they scan the home's "trifles": a partially cleaned table, a oddly sewn bit of stitching, a broken birdcage, etc.

The 1916 play remains remarkably fresh and modern.

Francesca says

THIS IS EXCELLENT. EXTRAORDINARY. As delicate as poignant, Susan Glaspell constructs a - feminist- detective story as an excuse to discuss a much bigger issue, gender violence (as suffered by our choir singer) and its grandfather sexism (evidenced in the way the males behave towards the two ladies). Written with graceful sensitivity and strong determination, this play deserves more and better attention, and so does its author. We call it - knot it.

Vahid says

This play holds a very pungent feminist view. The conflict is a murder case scrutinized by men while ladies accompany them to the crime scene as well . The men , who are generally considered serious and sagacious , keep looking for traces of murderer , while ladies are concerned about trivialities such as house decoration . Interestingly enough , the ladies find out the reason for homicide through their nonsense conversations but since the men consider their mentality ludicrous, they fail to notice the motif. Well , I think this author wrote about feminism in a new light!

Iria says

Brillantemente feminista. Non hai peza teatral que me guste máis e poucos finais me satisfacen tanto coma este.

Ahmed Ejaz says

??3 Stars??

It was a fine read...

Megan Hevener says

This one-act is one of my favorites. The reader does not know who did it until the very end. This will keep students on the edge of their seats while reading it, well that's my hope. There are different voices within this One-Act. Each character has a distinct dialect that one can hear in their heads. I would read this aloud so I can convey that to the students. This will help students see that voice doesn't just have to do with the way words are combined, but the way they are vocally said that helps convey meaning and emotion.

Reading: I would have the students do a probable passage before reading the play. This will help spark interest in the story. In addition, it will help students see if their inferences were correct or not based on how they answered the probable passage.

Writing: The students will do a Somebody, Wanted, But, So after reading the play. They will take about 15 minutes to complete this, and the students will share their SWBS with the class.

Dramapuppy says

Look, I get that this is an important and well-written piece of feminist theatre. But it's just really annoying. Intentionally so, but still. The whole thing is full of that specific type of dramatic irony that just makes you want to slap the characters in the face.

Did Glaspell communicate her point effectively? Yes. Do I want to be subjected to it? No.

Emma Getz says

I really loved this play. It was extremely interesting from a feminist perspective, whether the ending was justified or not, and perfectly expressed relationships between women and the hardships they endure that leave them with no other support but each other. I would love to see this interpreted in a modern context.

Ivonne Rovira says

English teachers almost universally use Kate Chopin's short story "The Story of an Hour" (1894) to illustrate irony. I would like to suggest the lesser known but more interesting play *Trifles* (1916) by Susan Glaspell. In the one-act play, a Mrs. Wright is suspected of having killed her husband and is being held in the county jail, but there isn't any proof -- or shall we say, not any that a man would notice. While men investigate the bedroom and the other parts of the house, the sheriff's wife and a neighbor woman collect some things for poor Minnie Wright. Time after time, the men condescend to the women and mock them for being concerned with "trifles" -- that is, women's things. But, in point of fact, it's amongst these "trifles" that proof of Mrs. Wright's innocence or guilt lies. The ending is sure to surprise you.

Susan Glaspell got the idea for the play after she covered the four-month trial involving a similar case in

1900 when she worked as reporter for *Des Moines Daily News*. (Glaspell quit her job immediately after the trial, moved to Chicago and turned to fiction.)

The text of the play, which is now in the public domain, is available online. The best version (just seven pages) is available from eBook Browse. L.A. Theatre Works has a performance of the play, which takes less than 30 minutes, and it's available on Audible.com for -- pardon the pun -- a trifle.

Miranda H says

A brilliant, subtle examination of the irony of the male ego and its ability to minimize the value and validity of women. This play is a timeless classic though unfortunately a bit out-of-reach for my freshmen class. I would suggest it for a more advanced or older group as most of the subtlety and time-specific references went over their heads. I am considering rewriting the play with a modern twist.

Phillip says

This play is really short, but it touches on a lot of interesting subjects. Probably number one is the relationship between gender and power in American society, though admittedly in the early 20th century. The smug paternalism of the male characters, and the reconstructed brutality of John Wright stand in stark contrast to the women's reluctance to pass judgment and ability to empathize with Mrs. Wright. The only odd spot is Mrs. Wright herself. Although we are, I think, meant to conclude that she murdered her husband because he killed the canary that was her only companion, the rest of her actions and concerns are unexplained. For instance, her seeming willingness to be caught in the house, her request for an apron and some other household things (though the two women speculate that she simply wants to feel normal). Of course, her absence makes it really difficult to get any understanding of her, and all we have to work from is the two women's speculation.

Claudia says

After reading this play I wasn't sure how I felt about it. There was not much happening but at the same time it was full of symbols.

The story starts with three men and two women in a house investigating the murder of John Wright and trying to find clues in the house to see if Mrs. Wright was the one who murdered him or if she wasn't. The main idea in the text is that women are clever and help one another, but men can't see that and think women only pay attention to silly things. We find that the evidence is found by women in things men would label as 'trifles'. We find a sexist attitude from men, who think there can't be any evidence of the murder in the kitchen because it's only a place for women. Throughout the play the two women are left in the kitchen while the three men 'work'.

As regards the symbols found in the play, we get the bird, which could either be a symbol of Mrs Wright seeming someone she's not (because the two women said she seemed like a bird, but maybe she was actually the cat who killed the bird), or maybe she was actually a bird and her husband killed many of the things she enjoyed doing (like singing) and she killed her husband for revenge. There is also the empty cage, which could be a symbol of freedom now that her husband is dead. Another symbol we get is related to what Mrs Wright was sewing, and how the two women keep saying that they didn't know if she was going 'to quilt it or

to knot it', and finally they agree that she was going to knot it. This could be related to the fact that Mrs Wright choked his husband to death with a rope around his neck.

I liked how this was a feminist story that gave traits to men and women that are still present nowadays in our society (sisterhood among women and cleverness vs. men thinking women only care about trifles). However, I personally think the story lacked some action, as I finished it and felt as if not much had actually happened.

Kenia Cuellar says

Trifles - Susan Glaspell

Loneliness brings desperate measures. While I was reading "Trifles by Susan Glaspell", I enjoyed the mystery and the suspense the play includes. In the end, what stood up to me the most is thinking on how lonely and misunderstood Mrs. Wright must have felt that led her to murder her husband. I had to pay attention to the year this was written which was 1916 because during those times women in the United States had not been granted the right to vote and also could not sit on juries. Males dominated all aspects of life at this time, except for caring of the home and children. Just as at this period of time, the men in the play consider themselves intellectually superior in their attempt to solve the murder mystery. Because these men are blinded by their superiority, they overlook great clues to find the murderer because they don't look in the kitchen. The kitchen is where Mrs. Wright and all women would spend most of their time cooking, boiling water to do laundry, heating her iron to do ironing, sitting to do her sewing, and many other things. I liked the irony of how the one place where the men didn't care to look was actually the place where the murder could have been solved. I think that Mrs. Wright was kept away for such a long time and she unhappy because she maybe felt misunderstood by her husband, they never had kids and they didn't even have a telephone. She was not allowed to socialize or even attend functions at church. I feel like the canary. The canary was symbolic of what Mrs. Wright was like before her marriage; happy, singing, wearing colorful clothes, and yet the canary's existence in its cage symbolizes her life since marriage.

When he kills the canary, Mrs. Wright goes over the edge emotionally. The broken cage and the sight of the little bird with its broken neck was more than she could bear. She ended her husband's life in the same way he ended the canary's..... and rather in the way he's ended hers, by suffocation. I think that Mrs. Wright felt suffocated by her husband and the kitchen represented the cage where she was kept in and she wanted to be free.
