

# Trifles film adaptation

[Literature](#), [Play](#)



Susan Glaspell's *Trifles* is a play about a murder mystery that is loosely based on an actual murder case that the author covered while working as a reporter for the *Des Moines Daily News* (Ben-Zvi 143). Since the play is written in 1916, a time when the boundaries between the private and public spheres are beginning to break down, it strongly reflects on the culture-bound notions of sex roles and gender. Back then, women are thought to be concerned about insignificant issues that hold little to no importance to the true work of society, also known as trifles, just as the title of the play suggests.

In 2008, Ghost Ranch Productions, with director Pamela Walker, who plays Mrs. Wright herself, produces *Trifles*, a film adaptation of Glaspell's famous play. Through the creative use of literary elements and some small alterations to the plot, dialogue, and setting, Walker effectively demonstrates the play's major theme of gender differences in the film. Exposition is the first difference between the beginning plot in Glaspell's play and the film adaptation.

Exposition or introduction “brings out everything the audience needs to know to understand and follow what is to happen in the play” (Roberts and Zweig 890). In the first part of the play, the plot begins when the sheriff, his wife, the county attorney, and a man named Mr. Hale and his wife all enter the Wright's disheveled kitchen where they assemble and plan for the investigation of Mr. Wright's murder. The play's exposition shows its audience that the entire play is about finding the evidence needed to solve the crime.

At the beginning of the film, on the other hand, a scene showing Mrs. Wright's strange and depressed demeanor, particularly in a scene where Mr. Wright's voice is heard harshly yelling at his wife in the background, points its audience toward the intriguing thought that she may be a victim of domestic violence. The creative exposition of the film reaches beyond what the play originally describes. It not only tells the audience what they need to know about what will happen next, but also creates a scenario that progresses to a more dramatic climax.

The film adaptation shows some dialogue alterations, particularly in the part where the county attorney interviews Mr. Hale, the first man to discover Mr. Wright's lifeless body. In Glaspell's play, Mr. Hale describes everything verbally when he is asked for the details of what transpired on the day he discovered Mr. Wright's murder. In the film, instead of Mr. Hale describing all the details and telling his side of the story, a different scene is created. The scene shows Mr. Hale paying John Wright a visit and being greeted by an expressionless Mrs.

Wright sitting on her rocking chair. All the dialogue in this scene is exactly as described by Mr. Hale in the play except for one line where he says: " And then she—laughed. I guess you would call it a laugh" (917). In the film, Mrs. Wright did not laugh or show any kind of expression associated with laughing. Her unemotional facial expression and vocal tone are consistent throughout the scene, which can be interpreted as someone who does not care about her husband's death or someone who is emotionally battered by the thought that her husband was just murdered.

The setting of the story is during a cold winter in the early twentieth century, and the action happens in the kitchen of a farmhouse in the American Midwest. Unlike in Glaspell's play, the film shows several series of short scenes at the beginning that help establish not only the events that take place in the kitchen, but also the surrounding area and the nearby town. The setting is described as the “ natural, manufactured, and cultural environment in which characters live and move, including all their possessions, homes, ways of life, and assumptions” (Roberts and Zweig 1448).

Glaspell's play only describes a setting of a gloomy kitchen in an abandoned farmhouse. On the other hand, the film shows a broader scope, including the gloomy and snowy weather, which makes Mr. Hale's shivering coming from the outside more realistic. The alteration to the setting in Glaspell's play not only helps with the mood of the story, but also helps the audience to visualize what is going on and connect to the characters better.

Overall, despite the minor differences and alterations to the plot, dialogue, and setting, both the film adaptation and Glaspell's play effectively illustrate the main theme of gender relationships and power between the sexes. On the surface, it seems that Trifles is only about the competing roles and different perspectives of men and women; however, this is only one important part of the play. Digging deeper, one sees that Trifles is about a concept that is even more profound. It is about how we pursue the truth, how we come to explain and interpret it, and how we value it.