

Gender stereotypes in 'trifles'

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



The One Act Play Trifles by Susan Glaspell is a murder story that ultimately alludes to the stigmatized 20th century woman. As the three men, the sheriff, the county attorney, and the neighbor, inspect the late John Wright's home after his strangulation, they often criticize the condition of the home that the murder suspect, Mrs. Wright, left it in.

Additionally, they belittle the wives' conversation on the subject of quilting since it isn't a masculine job. This constant criticism and belittling behavior by the men in the story help the reader understand gender roles and the stigma behind them. The theme of gender roles in this play is accomplished by the early 20th century setting and the stereotypical characterization of women at that time period. This play took place in or around 1916, a time period in which woman's suffrage was not even recognized by law yet.

Women, especially in rural areas such as the one depicted in the play, had little autonomy and were often expected to be housewives and mothers. However, Mrs. Wright's home was often described as being lonesome by the two wives, implying that she had no children. This implication was confirmed when Mrs. Hale said: "Not having children makes less work" but it makes a quiet house, and Wright out to work all day, and no company when he did come in. In essence, Mrs. Wright did not fulfill her expected duty of being a mother and her house wasn't kept as tidy as the men would have preferred, so she was not fulfilling her gender roles as expected, unlike the wives present. Additionally, the characterization of the wives was carefully written to fit the gender roles in the early 20th century. The women were often concerned with the condition of the fruit in the kitchen and the unfinished quilt that Mrs. Wright had left behind: "It's log cabin pattern. Pretty, isn't it? I

wonder if she was goin' to quilt it or just knot it? This dialogue came to be an important exchange because the men often mimicked their wives for this particular topic of conversation. The fact that they were making fun of their wives implied that they believed sewing was an insignificant and trivial task compared to their own labor.

Also, Mrs. Wright requested that Mrs. Peters bring her some belongings to the jail” within these belongings was an apron. She said she wanted an apron. Funny thing to want, for there isn't much to get you dirty in jail, goodness knows. But I suppose just to make her feel more natural, this dialogue by Mrs. Peters implies that a household item, an apron, would make Mrs. Wright feel more in her element. The apron could be seen as a symbol of a woman's gender role in this context. In conclusion, the underlying theme of gender relationships and gender roles was accomplished by the wives' stereotypical characters and the setting of rural 20th century. Susan Glaspell meticulously constructed these two literary elements (characters and setting) amongst others, to make her theme, the final literary element, crystal clear and easily understandable to the reader.