

# Trifles: a play in one act essay

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



By showing how oblivious the men are to the challenges and accomplishments of women's lives and women's work, Trifles forces us to question how we perceive the world. The male characters enter a house filled with clues to a desperately unhappy situation, and do not even notice. If this is possible in the setting of the play, what important hints to the truth are we, the viewers, missing and overlooking in everyday life?

The male characters assume that anything that the women do or think is trifling compared to the work of men. They assume, simultaneously, that the maintenance of domestic comfort is women's responsibility, no matter what the obstacles. For example, they expect a clean towel, but ignore the difficulty of effective laundry in a house so cold it freezes jam.

They mock the women over quilting versus knotting, or the state of the preserves, but undoubtedly expect a warm bed and sweet spread for their own flapjacks (Glaspell). The sheriff's wife is said to be "married to the law", and to need no supervision, as though she does lack an independent mind and will (Glaspell).

On the other hand, the women defer to the men, suggesting that their judgment is more valid somehow, at least in their own minds. When the two women find the canary with its neck broken, Mrs. Peters says, "My, it's a good thing the men couldn't hear us. Wouldn't they just laugh!" (Glaspell).

She recognizes that their feminine inferences might seem ridiculous to the men, but also could potentially send Mrs. Wright to her execution. Their concealment of the evidence they find is thus a brave act of solidarity with Mrs. Wright's rebellion against loneliness and abuse.

The Hairy Ape's naturalistic dialogue is mild in comparison with what the viewing public hears regularly in reality TV shows, but it must have seemed shocking when it premiered. The cruelty of the other laborers after Yank is insulted by Mildred as a "filthy creature", seems a bit artificially extreme, but is perhaps accurate for the era (O'Neill).

The play aims to make political points about class boundaries. Thus, the conflicts, for example, between Yank and the Gentleman walking on 5th Avenue, are heightened for dramatic effect. If the viewer accepts this premise, as I do, then these artificialities work.

The social and spiritual distance that Yank perceives, between himself and his fellow laborers, Mildred, the wealthy New Yorkers, the other prisoners, and finally, the Wobblies, all makes Yank feel totally alienated. His sense of isolation leads him to take a hideous risk that ends with him being crushed and thrown by a gorilla in the zoo.

While possibly unrealistic – a gorilla might more likely bite and pull limbs off – this makes a powerful visual pun. Yank is embraced by a hairy ape, exactly what Mildred visualized when she watched him lose his temper. He has found his soul mate, he imagines.

Yank's death is presented as resulting inevitably from his not fitting in anywhere. He is too thoughtful and proud for the drunken stokehold laborers. His speech is too shamelessly uncensored for the refined, hypocritical Mildred. He impulsively roughs up a socialite. He is too violent

for the I. W. W.. Even the gorilla rejects his companionship, dispatching him forever, in irritation with his tone of voice.

Glaspell, Susan. *Trifles: A Play in One Act*. Ed. Frank Shay. New York: Washington Square Players, 1916. Web.

O'Neill, Eugene. *The Hairy Ape*. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922. Web.