

The grass is singing essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

This is the high-tension story of a woman whose life was changed by a few careless words. Even though Mary Turner had led a somewhat limited life in her sleepy South African town, she was happy until she overheard some friends say that she would never marry. At those words, her delicately balanced little world overturned, and she suddenly realized that it was desirable to have a husband, to be like the rest of her circle. Unconsciously she began to look for a man to marry, and she found one. He was a farmer - a hard-working sensitive man with an intense love of his land, a stubborn pride - but with a fatal weakness.

When Dick took her to his farm in the veldt, Mary stepped into a life completely different from anything she had ever imagined. She hated the stuffy little house; she hated the natives; she hated Dick at times and most of all she hated the burning heat and the loneliness. After one attempt to return to her life in town, she stayed on the farm, listening to the strident din of the cicadas and fighting against the realization that the security and happiness which she and Dick needed so desperately might never come.

Little by little the years worked their slow poison. And then finally one heat-laden afternoon, without even realizing what she had done, Mary Turner lit the fuse that led to a shattering explosion of violence and tragedy. Doris Lessing's novel is a remarkable piece of work. At times as violent and harsh as the brown earth and arching blue sky of the veldt, *The Grass Is Singing* is mercilessly penetrating and casts a spell all its won. At times, too, it is angry at the festering question of black against white which broods over the land like thunder. But above all, it is the story of Mary Turner who was a victim of conflicting forces within herself set up by a few casual, overheard words.

Although born in Persia, Doris Lessing spent most of her childhood on her father's 3000-acre maize farm in Southern Rhodesia. Following her education at the Dominican Convent in Salisbury, she held a variety of jobs - nursemaid, telephone operator, chauffeur, and stenographer. Determined on a writing career, Mrs. Lessing, armed with £20 and the manuscript of *The Grass Is Singing*, arrived in England in the spring of 1949. Her novel was accepted immediately by Michael Joseph of London. Published there earlier this year, *The Grass Is Singing* was the March Daily Graphic Book Find of the Month. Mrs. Lessing has been writing short stories and poems, many of them published in South African magazines, since she was seventeen. *The Grass Is Singing* is her first published novel

The Grass Is Singing is the first novel, published in 1950, by British Nobel Prize-winning author Doris Lessing. It takes place in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), in southern Africa, during the late 1940s and deals with the racial politics between whites and blacks in that country (which was then a British Colony). The novel created a sensation when it was first published and became an instant success in Europe and the United States.

Mary has a happy and satisfied life as a single white Rhodesian (we assume, though the novel refers to both Rhodesia and the Union of South Africa simply as South Africa, while making clear the farm is in Southern Rhodesia) woman. She has a nice job, numerous friends, and values her independence. Nevertheless, after overhearing an insulting remark at a party about her spinsterhood, she resolves to marry. The man she marries, after a brief courtship, Dick Turner, is a white farmer struggling to make his farm profitable. She moves with him to his farm and supports the house, while

Dick manages the labor of the farm. Dick and Mary are somewhat cold and distant from each other, but are committed to their marriage. Dick and Mary live together an apolitical life mired in poverty.

When Dick gets sick Mary takes over the management of the farm and rages at the incompetence of her husband's farm practice. To Mary, the farm exists only to make money, while Dick goes about farming in a more idealistic way. Mary and Dick live a solitary life together. Because of their poverty Dick refuses to give Mary a child. They do not attend social events, yet are a great topic of interest among their neighbors. Mary feels an intimate connection with the nature around her, though being in general rather unexplorative in nature. Mary, like most Rhodesian women, is overtly racist, believing that whites should be masters over the native blacks. Dick and Mary both often complain about the lack of work ethic among the natives that work on their farm.

While Dick is rarely cruel to the workers that work for them, Mary is quite cruel. She treats herself as their master and superior. She shows contempt for the natives, and finds them disgusting and animal-like. Mary is cross, queenly, and overtly hostile to the many house servants she has over the years. When Mary oversees the farm labor she is much more repressive than Dick had ever been. She works them harder, reduces their break time, and arbitrarily takes money from their pay. Her hatred of natives results in her whipping the face of a worker because he speaks to her in English, telling her he stopped work for a drink of water. This worker, named Moses, comes to be a very important person in Mary's life, when he is taken to be a servant for the house.

Mary does not feel fear of her servant Moses but rather a great deal of disgust, repugnance, and avoidance. Often Mary does all she can to avoid having any social proximity with him. After many years living on the farm together, Dick and Mary are seen to be in a condition of deterioration. Mary often goes through spells of depression, during which she is exhausted of energy and motivation. In her frailty, Mary ends up relying more and more on Moses. As Mary becomes weaker, she finds herself feeling endearment toward Moses. On a rare visit from their neighbor, Slatter, Mary is seen being carelessly, thoughtlessly kind to Moses. This enrages Slatter. Slatter demands that Mary not live with that worker as a house servant. Slatter sees himself as defending the values and integrity of the white community.

Slatter uses his charisma and influence to convince Dick to give up ownership of his farm and go on a vacation with his wife. This vacation is to be a sort of convalescence for them. Dick spends his last month on his farm with Tony, who has been hired by Slatter to take over the running of the farm. Tony has good intentions and is very superficially cultured, but he finds himself having to adapt to the racism of the white community. One day Tony sees Moses dressing Mary and is surprised and somewhat amazed by Mary's breaking of the 'colour bar'. The book closes with Mary's death at the hand of Moses. Mary is expecting his arrival and is aware of her imminent death. Moses does not run from the scene as he originally intends, but waits a short distance away for the arrival of the police. [edit]Title, dedication, and introductory quotations

The title is a phrase from the fifteen lines of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* quoted after the novel's dedication to a Mrs Gladys Maasdorp " of Southern

Rhodesia, for whom I feel the greatest affection and admiration.” Found on both lines 354 and 386 of Part V: ‘ What the Thunder Said’, it is one of the more jubilant and reviving images used in that section, despite its theme of destruction’s power over growth. Lessing also quotes an anonymous author: “ It is by the failures and misfits of a civilisation that one can best judge its weaknesses. [edit]Analysis and impact on literature

The Grass Is Singing is a bleak analysis of a failed marriage, the neurosis of white sexuality, and the fear of black power that Lessing saw as underlying the white colonial experience of Africa.[citation needed] The novel’s treatment of the tragic decline of Mary and Dick Turner’s fortunes becomes a metaphor for the whole white presence in Africa.[citation needed] The novel is honest about the fault-lines in the white psyche. [edit]Adaptations

The book was adapted into a movie in 1981 by a Swedish company. Filmed in Zambia, the film stars John Thaw, Karen Black and John Kani in the lead roles. It is also known under the titles *Gräset sjunger* (Swedish) and *Killing Heat*.

Review “ An extremely mature psychological study. [The Grass Is Singing] is full of touches of truth seldom mentioned but instantly recognized. By any standards, this, book shows remarkable powers and imagination.” — New Statesman “ Emotional unity and force ... one of her best works.” — New York Review of Books “ Her impressive first novel is told with all the intensity and passion Miss Lessing compacts into all her work.” — — St. Louis Post-Dispatch “ There is passion here, a piercing accuracy a rare sensitivity and power. . . . One can only marvel.” — — New York Times Product Description

Product Description Set in South Africa under white rule, Doris Lessing's first novel is both a riveting chronicle of human disintegration and a beautifully understated social critique. Mary Turner is a self-confident, independent young woman who becomes the depressed, frustrated wife of an ineffectual, unsuccessful farmer. Little by little the ennui of years on the farm work their slow poison, and Mary's despair progresses until the fateful arrival of an enigmatic and virile black servant, Moses. Locked in anguish, Mary and Moses—master and slave—are trapped in a web of mounting attraction and repulsion. Their psychic tension explodes in an electrifying scene that ends this disturbing tale of racial strife in colonial South Africa.

The Grass Is Singing blends Lessing's imaginative vision with her own vividly remembered early childhood to recreate the quiet horror of a woman's struggle against a ruthless fate. Doris Lessing's "The Grass is Singing" opens with the death of Mary Turner. How could Mary's life have ended with such a tragic fate? As the reader progresses through the novel, he discovers Mary's insufferable existence, her life destroyed by a disastrous marriage to a farmer, Dick Turner. Mary is forced to live in a rural environment in South Africa for which she is ill-suited. Furthermore, Mary's relationship with her husband rapidly deteriorates as she realises that Dick is unable to manage the farm successfully and they are constantly on the verge of bankruptcy. A truly superb novel, tragic and moving to the very last line. Mrs Lessing's wonderfully captures Africa's majestic beauty, the difficult relationship between the whites and the Natives.

The psychological portrait of her heroine is exceptionally intense. When a colonial woman with a not unconventional upbringing who is not the luckiest

person, decides to go for broke and marries as she is getting on, what could happen? The anatomy of the master servant bond is one of the main themes of this book. Before welfare systems, all cultures had master servant relationships as the rich employed servants. The master servant relationship was stark in colonial Africa. The masters had to know the natives so that they could get work out of them and a certain amount of loyalty but the masters in Africa also had to keep the natives down, almost like animals, so that they could remain the masters and the servants could remain servants.

The natives of course as servants, could also benefit as underdogs as all servants do, being loyal, friendly and pleasing but not above their masters. Mary in the book, starts with preconceptions about her relationship to the Africans, and as things get from bad to worse, she is faced with a mistress servant relationship going horribly wrong.

Her husband is a fool, tied to the land and unable to organise his ambitions or get anything out of his farm. She knows better, but luck is never on their side. One actually has a respect for Mary and her penetrative intelligence, but the book describes how this very human intelligence with its stiff attitudes (she marries when she understands people are sniggering about her behind her back, in any case, women at the time did not have much choice in this), breaks down, collapses utterly.