

A jury of her peers – 1

Life



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

An Analysis of Characterization in “ A Jury of Her Peers” In “ A Jury of Her Peers” written by Susan Glaspell and published in 1917 a man named John Wright was choked to death in his bed with a rope. John Wright’s wife, Minnie is the prime suspect and has been taken to the jail to await her trial. The county lawyer George Henderson, the sheriff Henry Peters, his wife and the local farmer Lewis Hale and his wife Martha arrive at the home of John and Minnie Wright trying to locate clues so they could hold a trial and convict Minnie for the murder of her husband. Mrs.

Peters and Martha Hale, both very observant, quickly take note of the obvious clues in the home but choose to not reveal them to the men. This story takes place during a time when women were made to feel inferior to men. This is ironic because the men fail to see the obvious clues, that the ladies are uncovering, that are important to their investigation. Minnie Foster Wright, who is the main character in the story, has been forced to change her identity from a lovely girl who loved to sing in the choir and wear pretty dresses to one of a subservient housewife.

Minnie is a very dynamic character whose dreams were represented by her pet canary and ultimately choked by the hands of her husband. The story gives a lot of insight into the life of Minnie Wright and how she felt as a housewife but it is done through the eyes of her peers. George Henderson comes across as being narrow-minded and egotistical. He talks down to the women throughout the entire story, he looks inside the cupboard and says, “ Here’s a fine mess” (Glaspell 540).

After multiple comments and derogatory looks toward the ladies the lawyer remembers his role in the community and states, “ for all their worries, what <https://assignbuster.com/a-jury-of-her-peers-1/>

would we do without the ladies” (Glaspell 540)? George Henderson then falls back into superiority by criticizing the disarray and dirt in the farmhouse. Lewis Hale and Henry Peters share the same opinion of women and do not mind letting their wives know their place in the home. Mr. Hale made a statement that the women wouldn't know a clue if they came upon one and that they were only used to worrying over trifles. Ironically Mr.

Hale never realized that while he was busy keeping the women in their place they were solving the murder. Mr. Hale and Mr. Peters are so detached from the domestic world they didn't view the kitchen and its condition the same way the women did. Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale were under no illusions as to why the kitchen was in such disarray. The story indicates that Mrs. Hale is an obedient housewife that is very comfortable in her role being married to a farmer. She is a strong lady, a woman of principle and a lady that is given to neatness and that leaves no job unfinished.

For example, Paragraph 1 states “ her bread all ready for mixing, half the flour sifted and half unsifted”. This may seem to hold little significance to the story however we find that Mrs. Hales neatness and sense of organization allows to her see clues that the men overlook because of their views of the home. Mrs. Peters on the other hand seems to be very uncomfortable in her role as the sheriff's wife. Initially in the story Mrs. Peters appears weak and unwilling to withhold the clues from the men investigating the crime. Mrs.

Peters also discourages Mrs. Hale from withholding clues and tampering with evidence, however as the story progresses we find that Mrs. Peters has very strong convictions and that she can and will rise to the occasion. The ladies quickly pieced together what had happened, however because they relate to

Minnie they chose to keep it between themselves. To these ladies dirty towels and dishes were signs that things were not well at home. Mrs. Peters knew Minnie as a young lady that was full of life, had a beautiful voice and wore pretty clothes.

Over time things changed for the ladies and they grew apart and the guilt that was felt for not being a better neighbor and friend weighed heavy on their minds. Mrs. Peters said, " I know what stillness is" (Glaspell 550). Mrs. Peters understood where Minnie had been in life because her life wasn't that different. Although the ladies knew Minnie had committed the crime it wasn't until they found the broken cage and the choked canary that they felt empathy for her and begin defending her actions.

They both understood that John Wright had taken her song, " She used to sing. He killed that too" (Glaspell 550). The ladies knew that the crime should be punished but they justified the crime in their minds based on their personal situations, the way John Wright had treated Minnie, and the fact they hadn't taken the time from their own lives to visit. The ladies seemed to secretly enjoy knowing they have solved the puzzle based on their domestic skills of working in the kitchen down to the type of stitching on the quilts, even if that meant Mrs.

Peters going against her husband who was the law. They continued to talk in domesticated code to the men to the very end of the story where Mrs. Hale gave the men the final clue by using quilting terms and stating, " We call it knot it, Mr. Henderson" (Glaspell 553). Works Cited Glaspell, Susan. " A Jury of Her Peers. " Perrine's Literature, Structure, Sound, and Sense". Arp,

Thomas R. & Greg Johnson. 10th edition. Thomson/Wadsworth. 2009. (page number)