

Unprepared lives lead  
to unforgettable  
mistakes



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Adolescence is a confusing and vulnerable time in any young woman's life. Unfortunately, the sexual decisions one makes as an immature youth can set a dreary path for a woman's future. Unhealthy sexual lives such as these are displayed in Toni Morrison's "Jazz" and William Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury" through the characters of Dorcas and Caddy. At the time, these women are too young and immature to realize how their decisions will affect the rest of their lives, and their sexual acts quickly lead to their demise. It is important to understand why Dorcas and Caddy would need to become so sexual in their young lives in the first place to understand the choices they made and the consequences that follow. Furthermore, their choices are similar in that they are influenced by their families and the cities. However, the characters are judged differently, in that Dorcas is seen as a victim and, unfairly, Caddy is seen as a sinner. Dorcas and Caddy both suffer from tarnished families that lead them to make poor choices, eventually ruining their lives and the lives of those around them. Early in Dorcas' life she loses both parents on the same day, her father to a car accident and her mother to a house fire. This horrific tragedy leaves Dorcas to be raised by her aunt, Alice Manfred, a quiet, fearful woman that "worked hard to privatize her niece," (67). Alice Manfred was not evil, but she had been through situations that made her fear people, men especially, leaving her to raise her niece under "heated control" so that Dorcas would not be hurt by the pain men could cause her (77). Alice gave Dorcas no freedom at all and treated her as the child she was growing out of. She did not speak to Dorcas about the horrors and pains of the world and how to handle them; instead she kept a tight grip and a watchful eye on her. As a young girl, Dorcas began feeling trapped and lonely. Unequipped with life experiences, when she experienced

her first ounce of rejection by two brothers at a high school party, she could not handle it, “ So by the time Joe Trace whispered to her through a crack of a closing door her life had become almost unbearable,” and she was easily seduced by the older man (67). Caddy grew up in a much larger family, with both of her parents, several brothers and sisters, an uncle, and a servant. However, her large family did not result in strong parenting. Mrs. Compson treated her children like they were a burden, describing her thirty three year old retarded son as “ a judgment” on her, and Mr. Compson drank himself to death (5). Caddy, being the only daughter of the Compson family, became the mother figure for two of her brothers, in particular, Quentin and Benjy. This put a lot of pressure on Caddy, and as she began to grow into a young woman, the neglect she had received from her parents caught up to her. Caddy started looking to men for the love she had always wanted from her family. Unfortunately, these circumstances led to disappointing consequences for Caddy and other members of her family, which they deemed as unforgivable. Caddy and Dorcas’ childhoods reflect their need to search for love and acceptance outside of their homes, and at this young, vulnerable age, they knew no better than to do this by exploring their sexuality. Dorcas and Caddy’s affairs were very different, and led to different consequences. Dorcas’ affair began when she was only eighteen years old, with Joe Trace, a much older, married man her aunt had known for years. Being so young, Dorcas was very vulnerable to Joe, and being so closely controlled by her aunt, she needed something in her life she could control. Early into the affair Joe rented a place to be alone with Dorcas and “ to tell his new love things he never told his wife,” (36). In each other they felt special, loved, and revived. However, being so young and inexperienced,

Dorcas did not understand what she had gotten herself into. Joe was married, and involving oneself in situations like these can have very painful results. Regardless, he often brought her gifts, and she loved the attention, but was incapable of letting her relationship with Joe grow any deeper than that. Dorcas needed the attention and once she got it she was fulfilled, did not need it anymore. Joe, however, needed much more, and following Dorcas' rejection succumbs to violence, and shoots her. After being shot, Dorcas tells those around her not to save her, and then bleeds to death. At her funeral, Joe's wife slashes her face. The community looks upon as a martyr rather than an impure girl, because she died as a result of her actions. Dorcas' death made her seem like an innocent girl caught up in a seductive, violent situation with an older man, but Caddy does not get the same sympathy. Caddy's sexual experience did not end her life, but instead complicated it was before. The consequences of Caddy's actions affect her family. In "The Sound and the Fury," Caddy has sex out of wedlock and becomes pregnant. This first mistake costs her family their reputation. Then, trying to hide that her pregnancy was illegitimate, she quickly marries her boyfriend who had promised her brother, Jason, a job in a bank. However, upon finding out about the pregnancy, her husband divorces her, which costs Jason the job. On top of all of this, Quentin, the unstable, older brother that looked to Caddy as a mother, learns of her sin and commits suicide. Finally, after Caddy's baby is born, she is unable to care for her new daughter on her own, and Jason ends up being her guardian, which creates even more resentment towards Caddy. The bitterness Caddy's brother, Jason, holds for her is very apparent when he refers to Caddy's daughter as, "The bitch that cost me a job, the one chance I ever had to get ahead, that killed my father

and is shortening my mother's life every day and made my name a laughing stock in the town." Even worse, Caddy's daughter Miss Quentin, is continually blamed for the family's problems. Caddy never meant to hurt anyone. She was a scared, young girl, in a situation her parents had not prepared her to prevent or face. Caddy is not given any room to make mistakes in her life, even though her parents are the ones that made the ultimate mistake of not loving, nurturing or teaching her enough to be able to stay out of the kind of trouble she ends up engaging in. The sexual choices Dorcas and Caddy make are similar in that they result from poor parenting, but are different in their effects. Dorcas is seen as a victim because Joe Trace was much older and killed Dorcas, and because Joe's wife slashed Dorcas' lifeless face. Though both Dorcas and Caddy were looking for love, attention, and happiness, Caddy's case affected the reputations, jobs, and lives of her family members, who took her actions very personally. In "The Sound and the Fury" and "Jazz", Faulkner and Morrison show how young women lacking support and comfort at home can turn to men to fill the void in their lives. Regardless of how family members or the community responded to these women, they are both innocent in their actions because of the poor conditions in which they were raised. They cannot be blamed for seeking out attention and love when they were not getting it at home in the first place.