



Play Guide

Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?



American Stage Education Partner



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American Stage Theatre

American Stage is Tampa Bay's best professional regional Equity theatre. Founded in 1977, the company's mission is to create the most satisfying live theatre in the Tampa Bay area, accessible to all members of the community. The vision of American Stage is



to preserve the greatest human stories from our past, while creating the most defining stories and storytelling of our time.

American Stage presents its six-play Mainstage Series in its, 182-seat Raymond James Theatre each year. The very popular American Stage in the Park celebrates its 26th Anniversary year. The theatre's other programming includes: "After Hours" Series, School Tour, and camps and classes for children and adults.

It is American Stage Theatre Company's goal to share the enriching experience of live theatre. This play guide is intended to help you prepare for your visit to American Stage. Should you have any comments or suggestions regarding this play guide, or if you need more information about scheduling trips to see an American Stage production, please feel free to contact us:

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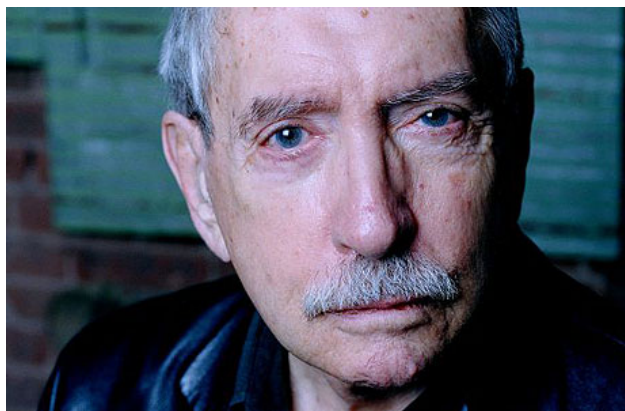
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The *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* study guide was compiled and written by Meg Heimstead.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

Exploring the Play

About the Playwright – Edward Albee



Edward Albee was born in Washington, DC on March 12, 1928. He was adopted as an infant by Reed Albee, the son of Franklin Albee, a powerful American Vaudeville producer. Young Albee was raised by his adoptive parents in Westchester, New York. Because of his father's and grandfather's involvement in the theatre business, Edward was exposed to theatre and well-known Vaudeville personalities throughout his childhood.

Edward's mother, Frances, tried to groom her son to be a respectable member of New York society. The Albee's affluence meant that Edward's childhood was filled with servants and tutors. The family's Rolls Royce took him to afternoon matinees, he took riding lessons and learned to sail on Long Island Sound in the summer.

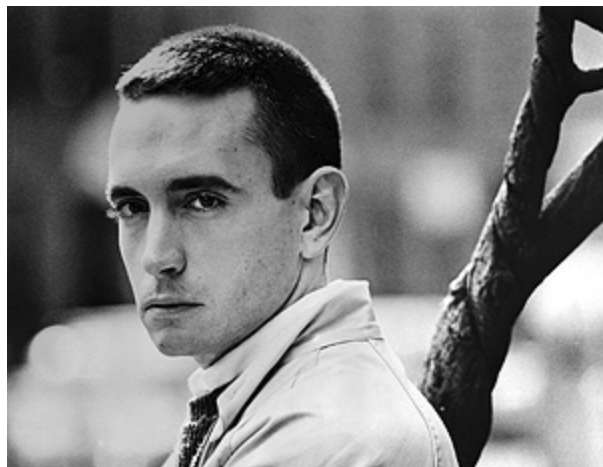
However, Albee rebelled against his mother's social grooming and his family's wealth. Albee was consistently dismissed from the schools that his parents sent him to for cutting classes. At the age of 19 he was expelled from Trinity College for failing to attend chapel and many of his classes. Despite his mother's objections, 20 year old Albee moved to New York's Greenwich Village where he held a variety of odd jobs including office boy, record salesman, and messenger for Western Union.

In 1958, Albee wrote his first major play, a one-act entitled *The Zoo Story*. The play tells the story of a drifter who acts out his own murder with the unwitting aid of an upper-middle class editor. When no New York producer would agree to stage it, Albee was able to get it produced in Berlin.

"Every honest work is a personal, private wowl, a statement of one individual's pleasure or pain." – *Edward Albee*

About the Playwright – Edward Albee (continued)

After its success abroad, American theatre producer Alan Schneider agreed to produce *The Zoo Story* off-Broadway in a double bill with Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*. This early association with Beckett served to cement Albee's connection to the Theatre of the Absurd. Along with his other early plays such as *The Sandbox* (1959) and *The American Dream* (1960), *The Zoo Story* effectively gave birth to American absurdist drama. Albee was hailed as the leader of a new theatrical movement and labeled as the successor to Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams and Eugene O'Neill.



Edward Albee, seen here in 1962

He is, however, probably more closely related to such European playwrights as Beckett and Harold Pinter. Although they may seem at first glance to be realistic, the surreal nature of Albee's plays is never far from the surface. In *A Delicate Balance* (1966), for example, Harry and Edna carry a mysterious psychic plague into their best friend's living room. In *Three Tall Women* (1994), separate characters on stage in the first act turn out to be, in the second act, the same character at different stages of her life.

Albee describes his work as “an examination of the American Scene, an attack on the substitution of artificial for real values in our society, a condemnation of complacency, cruelty, and emasculation and vacuity, a stand against fiction that everything in this slipping land of ours is peachy-keen.”

Although he suffered through a decade of plays without a commercial hit in the 1980's, Albee experienced a stunning success with *Three Tall Women* (1994) which won him his third Pulitzer Prize. His other Pulitzer Prize winning plays include *A Delicate Balance* (1966) and *Seascape* (1975). In 2002 he wrote *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?* which was a finalist for the 2003 Pulitzer and won the 2002 Tony Award for best play.

Albee has applied his theatrical talents to directing productions of his own plays and has also served as co-producer at the New Playwrights Unit Workshop, co-director of the Vivian Beaumont Theatre, and a member of the National Endowment for the Arts grants-giving council. He has lectured extensively at college campuses and visited Russia and several Latin American countries on cultural exchanges through the U.S. State Department.

“The responsibility of the writer is to be a sort of demonic social critic – to present the world and people in it as he sees it and say 'Do you like it? If you don't like it change it.'” – *Edward Albee*

About the Playwright – Edward Albee (continued)

“And I would hope that every play I write shakes a few people up, asks a few questions that people would rather not think about.” –
Edward Albee

A Glance at Career

Edward Albee's Plays

The Zoo Story (1958)
The Death of Bessie Smith (1959)
The Sandbox (1959)
Fam and Yam (1959)
The American Dream (1960)
Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1961-1962)
Tiny Alice (1964)
A Delicate Balance (1966)
Box and Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse Tung
 (1968)
All Over (1971)
Seascape (1974)
Listening (1975)
Counting the Ways (1976)
The Lady from Dubuque (1977-1978)
Another Part of the Zoo (1981)
The Man Who had Three Arms (1981-1982)
Finding the Sun (1982-1983)
Marriage Play (1987)
Fragments (1993)
Three Tall Women (1994)
The Lorca Plays (1995)
The Play About the Baby (2001)
The Goat – or – Who is Sylvia? (2002)
The Occupant (2002)

Awards

Tony Awards

1962 *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*
 2002 *The Goat*

Pulitzer Prize

1966 *A Delicate Balance*
 1974 *Seascape*
 1994 *Three Tall Women*

1980 Gold Medal in Drama from the
 American Academy and Institute of
 Arts and Letters

1996 Kennedy Center Honors and
 National Medal of Arts

“I think you can change the way people think about their consciousness – you can change just about everything about them. You make them aware that they're missing the boat, that they are not being fully alive.” –
Edward Albee

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? – Production History

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? opened on Broadway on October 13, 1962, featuring Uta Hagen as Martha and Arthur Hill as George. That same month the world seemed poised on nuclear war when the United States faced off against the Soviet Union against the presence of nuclear weapons on Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Albee's play was clearly a product of its time. Indeed, the profanity and hateful words between George and Martha that so shocked audiences in the 1960's now seem commonplace to an American public accustomed to reality television. Such was not the case, however, in 1962 America, still lingering on the optimism of the 1950's. This was a time before Vietnam, before Watergate, and before the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

The play was an enormous commercial success. Many audience members and critics lauded it as revolutionary and as marking a new era in American drama. It played to packed houses for 664 performances and won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award and the Tony Award for Best Play that year. Within the decade, Albee became the second most produced playwright, after Shakespeare, on college campuses.

But many of the people who saw *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* during its 1962 run found its language and sexual content shocking and labeled it "perverse" and "dirty minded." The committee selected to choose the play that would be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1962 voted to make *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* the winner. However, the Pulitzer Prize is overseen by Columbia University, and the trustees of the university decided that the play's explicit language, interest in "taboo" subjects, and controversial public reception made it the wrong choice. Though it had won the vote, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* did not receive the award, which was not given to any play that year as a result.

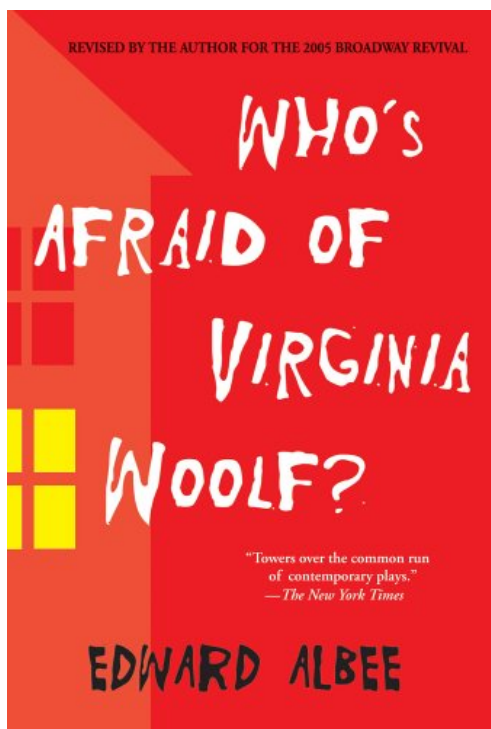
Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? was turned into a film in 1966 starring real-life husband and wife, Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. Taylor and Sandy Dennis, who played Honey, both won Academy Awards for their performances. The movie was the film debut of Mike Nichols, who went on to be one of America's greatest film directors with classics such as *The Graduate*, *Primary Colors* and *Angels in America*.



Since the play's 1962 debut, it has had numerous regional productions at theatres such as the Guthrie, featuring Patrick Stewart and Mercedes Ruehl. It was revived on Broadway in 2005 with Kathleen Turner and Bill Irwin as Martha and George. It is currently playing in Chicago at the Steppenwolf Theatre. Albee himself directed a Broadway revival in 1976.

The Title

From Ally Theatre's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Teacher Guide



The title of the play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, has been construed as an absurdist joke with a deliberately ambiguous meaning. According to Susan Edmiston's book, *Literary New York*, Edward Albee entered a bathroom in a bar and saw "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" written across a mirror in soap, an academic take-off on Barbara Streisand's 60s hit, "Who's Afraid of the Big, Bad Wolf?" The play has nothing specifically to do with Virginia Woolf, the prominent 1920's British feminist writer. It is possible, however, to make connections between the ideas in Woolf's modernist, socially critical novels and essays to Albee's work in the play. Where Woolf's work sought to elucidate the human condition, Albee's characters consistently dissemble, and the song "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" is consistently associated with moments where the characters are projecting, or attempting to project, false images. Woolf is also considered a complex, difficult writer. No one competing to

demonstrate intellectual power (such as George and Nick) would want to admit being afraid of or not understanding her writing. The song is a witty joke that represents the real, however silly, fear quite common in intellectual circles. In addition, the song is a parody of a children's song, begging the question of whether the characters in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* are children or adults.

Within the play, each act has its own title. Act One is "Fun and Games," a notion that takes on a sinister twist almost immediately. Act Two is "Walpurgisnacht," or "Night of the Witches." In European folklore it refers to a night when witches gathered for orgies. In this act, George and Martha's games become their most vicious and hurtful. Act Three is "The Exorcism," which suggests the characters (particularly Martha) having to put demons/illusions to rest and finally face reality.

Plot Summary

From www.sparknotes.com

The play is set on the campus of a small, New England university. It opens with the main characters, George and Martha, coming home from a party at her father's house. The two of them clearly care deeply for each other, but events have turned their marriage into a nasty battle between two disenchanted, cynical enemies. Even though the pair arrives home at two o'clock in the morning, they are expecting guests; the new math professor and his wife.

Of course, as it turns out, this new, young professor, Nick, actually works in the biology department. He and his wife, Honey, walk into a brutal social situation. In the first act, "Fun and Games," Martha and George try to fight and humiliate each other in new, inventive ways. As they peel away each other's pretenses and self-respect, George and Martha use Nick and Honey as pawns, transforming their guests into an audience to witness humiliation, into levers for creating jealousy, and into a means for expressing their own sides of their mutual story. In the second act, "Walpurgisnacht," these games get even nastier. The evening turns into a nightmare. George and Martha even attack Honey and Nick, attempting to force them into revealing their dirty secrets and their true selves. Finally, in the last act, "The Exorcism," everyone's secrets have been revealed and purged. Honey and Nick go home, leaving Martha and George to try to rebuild their shattered relationship.



Kathleen Turner (Martha) and Bill Irwin (George) in the 2005 Broadway production

Character Analysis

George

George is Martha's husband. He is forty-six-years-old and a professor of history who has amassed a record of academic mediocrity. He married Martha, daughter of the college president, early in his career but has failed to live up to the overwhelming expectations of his wife and her father, who hoped George would succeed him. George, as Martha is fond of saying, is a bog in the history department; after many years he is not yet even the department chair.

As a result of his professional frustration, George feels threatened by up-and-coming young faculty members like Nick and tries to compensate through showy displays of intellectual superiority. George appears to have been responsible for the deaths of both his parents and is clearly traumatized by this fact.

Honey

A twenty-six-year-old blond girl, "rather plain." Like her husband, Nick, Honey is from the Midwest, striving with her husband to make their way in new surroundings. Honey is not depicted as particularly bright, but she is capable of exerting her will. She is afraid of bearing a child, and as George suspects, she has avoided pregnancy without Nick's knowledge. The circumstance of her marriage to Nick, a false pregnancy, is a source of discomfort to both of them.

Martha

Martha is a boisterous woman in her fifties, with loud, coarse ways and a dominating manner toward her husband, George. Martha had dreams of power which she feels were defeated by George's lack of ambition. Despite her relentless ridicule of George, Martha is very sensitive to George's criticisms – of her heavy drinking, her sometime lascivious behavior, and her "braying" laugh.

Nick

Nick is blond and good looking, around thirty-years-old. He is a young biology professor who represents a threat to George with his good looks and sexual energy, and his ambition and willingness to prostitute himself for professional advancement. In short, Nick seems capable of achieving the promise to which George never lived up to.

Character Name Analysis

From Ally Theatre's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Teacher Guide

George and Martha

Although Albee has downplayed the significance of the names of George and Martha, he has admitted that he named them after George and Martha Washington. Here are a few explanations given for his choice:

“I did name the two lead characters of *Virginia Woolf* George and Martha because there is contained in the play...an attempt to examine the success or failure of American revolutionary principals.”

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? was ...”the result of my examination of the 50s, as much as anything. Many of us suspected that even though we were terribly enthusiastic about the Thousand Days of Kennedy, before terribly long it would be business as usual and things could slide back to the way they were. And, indeed, quickly enough they did.”

Regardless of Albee's intentions, George and Martha's names are certainly an example of the influence of history on the play.

Nick

Originally, Nick did not have a formal name; instead, he was simply named Dear, the term Honey uses to refer to him throughout the play. Albee has said that he named Nick after Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet Union premiere during the time Albee wrote the play. Khrushchev was one of Stalin's top advisors who rose to power after Stalin's death. Khrushchev wanted to make the Soviet system more effective by curbing Stalin's excesses, and in a famous speech he attacked Stalin for his crimes. He did not mention, however, his own complicity in those offenses. In the relation to the West, Khrushchev's tenure was marked by a series of high-stake crises, including the building of the Berlin Wall and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Despite these events, Khrushchev was the first Soviet leader to advocate a peaceful coexistence with the West and negotiated with the United States to decrease Cold War tensions. Considering the political allusion, Nick and George's confrontations may possibly parallel the conflict between East and West: the energetic threat of communism (Nick) versus decaying American ideals (George).

Nick's name also has religious connotations: “Old Nick” is an old-fashioned term for the devil.

Honey

Honey is probably not her real name; rather, it's merely the “affectionate,” and some may argue condescending term by which Nick calls her. It is also interesting to note that neither George nor Martha refers to Nick or Honey by their names, and Honey doesn't call Nick anything other than Dear.

Themes

From www.gradesaver.com

Reality vs. Illusion

Throughout the play, illusion is indistinguishable from reality. It is difficult to tell which of George and Martha's stories are true or fictional, particularly about their son and George's past. It is the illusion of the son that sustains their tempestuous marriage. At the end of the play, George "kills" the illusion when Martha has brought it too far into reality. Nick and Honey's lives are based on illusion. Nick has married for money, not love. While he seems to be strong and forceful, he is impotent. Honey's illusion surrounds the details of the pregnancy. Nick and Honey's illusions have just started while George and Martha have been thriving in them for years.

Games and War

The title of the first act is "Fun and Games." That in itself is deceptive, for the games that George and Martha play with their guests are not the expected party games. Rather, their games of Humiliate the Host, Get the Guests, and Hump the Hostess involve the characters' deepest emotions. George's characterization of these emotionally destructive activities as games and assumption of the role of ring master reveal that all the events of the evening are part of a power struggle between him and Martha, in which one of them intends to emerge as victor. Martha and George's verbal banter and one-upmanship is also characteristic of their ongoing game playing. Years of marriage have turned insults into a finely honed routine. By characterizing these activities of games, Albee does not suggest that they are frivolous or meaningless. Rather, he likens game playing to war and demonstrates the degree to which George and Martha are committed to destroying each other. George and Martha in fact declare "all out war" on each other. What begins as a game and a diversion escalates over the course of the play until the characters try to destroy each other and themselves.



Set rendering for American Stage's production of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*
Designed by Scott Cooper

Themes (continued)

History vs. Biology

George and Nick's academic departments at New Carthage College set up a dialectic in which the play presents a warning about the future of life. George is an associate professor in the History Department, while Nick is a new member of the Biology Department. Old, tired, and ineffectual, George exemplifies the subject that he teaches. What's more, he notes that no one pays attention to the lessons of history. Nick, as a representative of science, is young and vital. In the words of George, he is the "wave of the future." Through Nick and George's argument about Biology and History, the play demonstrates two clashing worldviews. George's lack of success in the History Department and inability to rise to power as successor to the president of the college contrasts with Nick's plans and seeming ability to move ahead – first taking over the Biology Department, then the college. George's criticism of Biology's ability to create a race of identical test tube babies all like Nick, and Nick's ruthless willingness to take any means necessary (including sleeping with faculty wives) to get ahead reveals the absence of morality and frightening uniformity in a future determined by science. What's more, in exposing seemingly virile Nick's impotence, the play demonstrates the underlying powerlessness of science and in George's perseverance, the unexpected staying power of history.

The American Dream

The play explores the illusion of an American dream that masks a core of destruction and failure. Writing during the Cold War, Albee was responding to a public that was just beginning to question the patriotic assumptions of the 1950's. His George and Martha reference patriotic namesakes George and Martha Washington. Albee uses this symbolic first couple's unhappy marriage as a microcosm for the imperfect state of America. When George and Martha's marriage is revealed to be a sham based on the illusion of an imaginary son, the viewer is led to question the illusions that similarly prop up the American dream. Nick and Honey, a conventional American dream couple, are also revealed to be presenting a false happy façade. They too secretly take advantage of and lie to each other. What's more, Nick's name is a direct reference to the Soviet premiere Nikita Khrushchev, and his threat to George and Martha's marriage references the Cold War turmoil of America.

The Christian Allegory

Subtle references to Christianity, particularly to Catholic rites and rituals, abound in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. For instance, Martha refers to her son as a "poor lamb," making him a Christ symbol – for Jesus is also known as the Lamb of God. George chants the Kyrie Eleison, Dies Irae, and Requiem from Catholic liturgy. The doorbell chimes that sound as the end of the second act echo the chimes that sound during a Catholic mass. Albee even names the third act of the play "The Exorcism." That name, of course, refers to George's attempt to kill the "son" and thus exorcise illusion from his marriage. The killing of the "lamb" can also be seen as a sacrifice necessary to save George and Martha's marriage. George calls the proceedings "an Easter pageant," referencing the day the Lamb of God was sacrificed to save the world, and the scene even takes place early on a Sunday morning.

Themes (continued)

Love and Hate

In his portrayal of George and Martha's marriage, Albee seems to make the not-uncommon literary assertion that love and hate are two parts of a single whole. From their vitriolic banter, it clearly appears that George and Martha hate each other. In fact, they say as much and even pledge to destroy each other. Nonetheless, there are moments of tenderness that contradict this hatred. George even tells Nick not to necessarily believe what he sees. Some of George and Martha's arguments are for show; others are for the challenge of arguing, while still others are indeed meant to hurt each other. However, Martha's declaration that George is really the only one who can satisfy her suggests that there is or has been positive aspects to their marriage. Clearly, as much as they fight, they also need each other, even if just to maintain the illusions that keeps them going.



Elizabeth Taylor (Martha) and Richard Burton (George) in the 1966 film version of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

Exploring the Context of the Play

Snapshots of 1962

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? opened on Broadway on October 13, 1962. The play is set on the campus of New Carthage, a small New England College. Here's some of what was going on beyond the campus.



President John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev

Vatican Council. The announced purpose was spiritual renewal and a reconsideration of the position of the church in the modern world. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy permits the liturgy to be conducted in vernacular language instead of Latin.

- For one week the world seems on the brink of nuclear war as the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. square-off over Soviet intermediate-range missiles in Cuba.
- France transfers sovereignty to the new republic of Algeria. The transfer sparks terrorism in both Algeria and France.
- Pope John XXIII opens the Second Vatican Council. The announced purpose was spiritual renewal and a reconsideration of the position of the church in the modern world. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy permits the liturgy to be conducted in vernacular language instead of Latin.
- John Glenn becomes the first American to orbit the Earth.
- James Meredith becomes the first African-American to enroll at the University of Mississippi. Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett tries to bar his admission. Angry whites riot, causing three deaths and numerous injuries.
- President John F. Kennedy defends the U.S. role in Southeast Asia saying that the troops are "not combat troops in the generally understood sense of the word."
- Mariner II reaches Venus. The first interplanetary probe sends back photos of the cloud-shrouded planet.
- Telstar Communications satellite launched, making it possibly the first live transatlantic television broadcast.
- Pat Brown defeats Richard Nixon in the California gubernatorial race.
- Peter Fetcher becomes the first person killed in an attempt to flee East Berlin over the Wall.
- Johnny Carson replaces Jack Parr as host of *The Tonight Show*.

Snapshots of 1962 (continued)



John Steinbeck

Nobel Prizes

Literature: John Steinbeck

Peace: Linus Pauling

Physiology or Medicine: James D. Watson, Maurice H.F. Wilkins, and Francis H.C. Crick for determining the structure of DNA

Grammy Awards

Record of the Year: "Moon River," Henry Mancini

Album of the Year: "Judy at Carnegie Hall," Judy Garland



Judy Garland



Academy Awards

Best Picture: *West Side Story*

Tony Awards

Best Play: *A Man for All Seasons*

Best Musical: *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*

Emmy Awards

Outstanding Achievement Humor: *The Bob Newhart Show*



Bob Newhart

Major Films

Lawrence of Arabia, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Manchurian Candidate*



Marilyn Monroe

Deaths

Marilyn Monroe, Niels Bohr, William Faulkner, Ernie Kovacs, Eleanor Roosevelt



Eleanor Roosevelt

Wit and Wordplay

The dialogue in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is rife with literary allusions and foreign words. Knowledge of these references will enrich the theatre-goers' appreciation of both the humor and cruelty of the play.

Abomination: A thing that causes disgust or hatred. (Act I)

Abstruse: To understand. (Act I)

Aegean: The Aegean Sea is located between the Greek peninsula on the west and Turkey to the east, with Crete forming a geographical division. The Aegean Sea region was the home of two of the world's earliest civilizations – the Minoan Civilization of Crete and the intellectual and military empire of Greece. It was also the area where much of early Christianity grew from. (Act III)

Albatross: An obstacle to success. (Act I)

Bandied: Frequently used in casual conversation. (Act I)

Bête: French, beast. (Act III)

Blue games: Not for children, a "blue" act was an obscene skit from a nightclub. (Act I)

Blue circles around her: Pagan women would often paint blue circles on them for use in rituals. (Act I)

Bucolic: A description of an idealized rural life; also a literary form, usually a short descriptive poem, which depicts rural or pastoral life, manners, and occupations. (Remember that Nick and Honey are from Kansas, farm country.) (Act II)

Bravura: Great enthusiasm. (Act II)

Canaille: French; scum, scoundrel. (Act II)

Carthage: A North African city, which fell prey to internal conflicts and eventually was sacked by the Romans during the Punic Wars (c. 150 B.C.); in Virgil's *The Aeneid*, the ancient, tragic love story of Dido and Aeneas is played out in Carthage. "You think you are going to be happy here in New Carthage, eh?" (Act I)

Chippie: Slang; promiscuous woman. "Ohhhh! I'll bet! Chippie-chippie-chippie, hunh?" (Act III)

Cipher: An unimportant person or thing.

Cochon: French; pig. (Act II)

Contemptuous: The feeling that a person or thing is worthless or beneath consideration. (Act II)

Convolutd: Folded or twisted in a complex way. (Act II)

Crazy Billy: In an interview, Albee said the name was a private joke; his lover at the time was named Bill, and Albee said they both worked at Western Union. (Act III)

Crete: Home to the Minoans, one of the earliest civilizations. (Act II)

Wit and Wordplay (continued)

Cretins: Someone with a congenital mental deficiency. (Act II)

Daguerreotype: An early kind of photograph produced using silver-coated copper plate and mercury vapor. (Act II)

Declension: The changes in the form of a noun, pronoun or adjective that identify its grammatical case, number or gender. (Act I)

Derisively: Expressing contempt or ridicule. (Act II)

Dies Irae: Latin, from the Mass for the Dead; day of wrath. "...through all the sensible sounds of men building, attempting, comes the Dies Irae." (Act II)

Fen: A low and marshy or frequently flooded area. (Act I)

Flagellation: To whip someone, originally as a form of religious punishment.

Flores: "Flores para los muertos. Flores." Spanish; Flowers for the dead. Flowers. Quoted from Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Frau: German for Mrs., sometimes meant as an insult to describe someone as dowdy and unappealing.

Gelding: A castrated animal, especially a male horse. (Act III)

Gatling gun: A machine gun with a cluster of barrels that are fired in sequence as the cluster is rotated. (Act III)

Gird: Encircle or secure with a belt or band. (Act III)

Gomorra: Biblical city which was destroyed by fire from God for its wickedness.

Harridan: A bossy or aggressive old woman. (Act III)

Illyria: City on the coast of the Adriatic Sea; home of a contentious people, the city was destroyed by Rome during the Punic Wars; the setting of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. "And this...this is your hearts content – Illyria...Penguin Island...Gomorra..." (Act I)

Incredulity: Being unwilling or unable to believe something. (Act I)

Ineffectual: Ineffective. (Act II)

Insinuate: Gradually move oneself into a favorable position. (Act II)

Lady Chatterley: Character in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) by D.H. Lawrence. She is an aristocrat who elopes with her groundskeeper. "A kind of junior Lady Chatterley arrangement...the marriage." (Act I)

Majorca: Island off the Mediterranean coast of Spain; once occupied by Carthaginians and their conquerors, the Romans; there are also many remains on the island of a primitive masonry technique referred to today as "Cyclopean" (connects to George's calling Martha a Cyclops); Majorca also experienced a decline at one point because of fighting among different groups living on the island. (Act III)

Wit and Wordplay (continued)

Manchuria: The northeast area of China; Japan and Russia long struggled over control of this rich, strategically important region; at the end of WWII, Chinese Communists were strongly established in Manchuria, and from 1949-1954, it was one of the staunchest Communist areas in China. (Act II)

Monstré : French; monster. (Act II)

Ostensibly: Apparently true, but not necessarily so. (Act I)

Parnassus: In Greek mythology, a mountain whose twin summits were devoted to Apollo and to the muses. Considered to be the seat of poetry and music. (Act I)

Penguin Island: From a satirical treatment of French history by Anatol France (*L'Île de Pingouins*, 1928); an island proselytized by a near blind French monk who baptizes the island's inhabitants without realizing that they are all penguins. (Act I)

Peritonitis: A serious inflammation of the abdomen's lining. (Act I)

Pyrrhic victory: Won at too great a cost to have been worthwhile. (Act I)

Poe-bells: Reference to Edgar Allen Poe's poem "The Bells" (1849), which through rhythm and onomatopoeia evokes the sound of ringing bells. "I was asleep, and the bells started...they BOOMED!...Poe-bells...they were Poe-bells." (Act II)

The Poker Night: A scene from Tennessee Williams' play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. "Up the spout: THE POKER NIGHT. Up the spout." Also the original name of the play.

Punic wars: A series of wars during which Rome attacked and conquered the powerful city-state of Carthage. The effort transformed Rome from a regional power into an empire. (First Punic War 264-241 B.C., Second 281-202, Third 149-146 B.C.)

Putan: French for vulgar, whore. (Act II)

Sacre du Printemps: French; *Rite of Spring*; ballet (1913) by Russian composer Igor Stravinsky, with dramatic, almost violent rhythms, the work evokes Russian pagan rituals. "Martha's going to pin on some rhythm she understands...Sacre du Printemps, maybe." (Act II)

Salaciously: Having too much interest in sexual matters.

Snapdragons: In Western folklore, snapdragons are believed to ward off evil. (Act III)

Sonny-Jim: A term for an "all-American guy" that was initially used genuinely during the 1930s-50s but eventually became more cynical; also a political reference to Republican James Rolph, Jr., who served as the mayor of San Francisco for 19 years and became governor of California in 1930. (Act III)

Walpurgisnacht: German; the eve of May Day; witches' Sabbath celebrated in medieval Europe; night of orgiastic celebration on which evil spirits are exorcised from cities and towns. (Act III)

The Latin Mass – A Translation

George recites this mass in Act III. In the Catholic faith, the Mass for the Dead is said on the occasion of a funeral or anniversary of a death.

Absolve, Domine, animas omnium fidelium defunctorum ab omni vinculo delictorum.
Absolve, O Lord, the souls of all the faithful departed from every bond of sin.

Et gratia tua illis succurrente, mereantur evadere judicium ultionis.
And by the help of Thy grace, may they be enabled to escape the judgment of punishment.

Et lucis aeternae beatitudine perfrui.
And enjoy the happiness of eternal light.

In Paradisum deducant te Angeli.
May the angels lead you into paradise.

In memoria aeterna erit Justus; ab auditione mala non timebit.
The just shall be in everlasting remembrance; he shall not fear the evil hearing.

Dominus vobiscum.
The Lord be with you.

Libra me, Domine, de morte aeterna, in die illa tremenda: Quando caeli movendi sunt et terra: Dum veneris judicare saeculum per ignem. Tremens factus sum ego, et timeo, dum discussio venerit, atque ventura ira. Quando caeli movendi sunt et terra. Dies illa, dies irae, calamitatis et miseriae; dies et amara valde. Dum veneris judicare saeculum per ignem. Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine: et lux perpetua luceat eis. Libera me Domine de morte aeterna in die illa tremenda: quando caeli movendi sunt et terra; Dum veneris judicare saeculum per ignem.

Deliver me, O Lord, from death everlasting, upon that dread day of terror: When the heavens and earth shall be moved: When Thou shalt come and judge the world in fire. Trembling and full of fear I approach the time of the trial of the wrath to come. When the heavens and earth shall be moved. Day of anger, day of terror, day of calamity and misery, day of mourning and woe. When Thou shalt come and judge the world in fire. Eternal rest grant them, Lord: and light perpetual shine down upon them. Deliver me, O Lord, from death everlasting, upon that dread day of terror: When the heavens and earth shall be moved: When Thou shalt come and judge the world in fire.

Kyrie, eleison. Christe, eleison. Kyrie, eleison.
Lord, have mercy on us. Christ, have mercy on us. Lord, have mercy on us.

Requiescat in pace.
Rest in peace.

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine.
Eternal rest grant them, Lord.

Et lux perpetua luceat eis.
And light perpetual shine down upon them.

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

More to Read

Interested in knowing more about Edward Albee and his plays? Here are some books, websites and films to check out.

Books

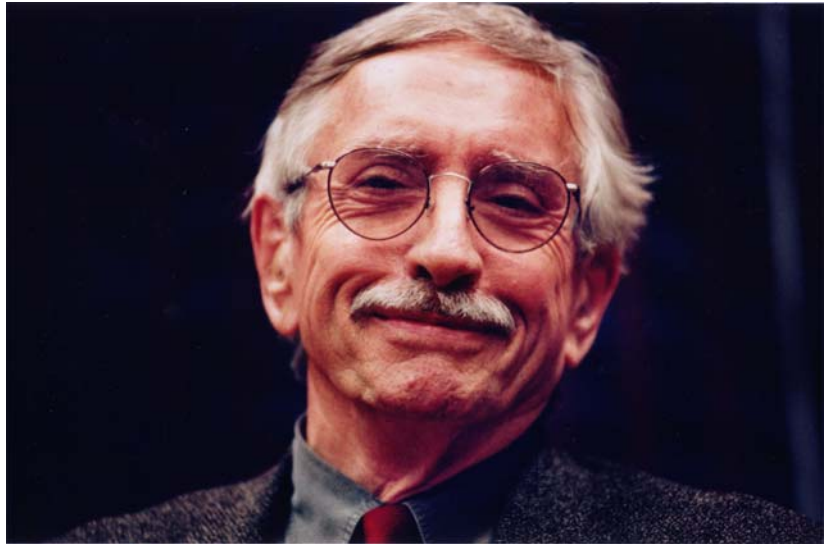
Bigsby, C.W.E., editor. *Edward Albee: A collection of Critical Essays*. Engelwood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Incorporated, 1975.

Bloom, Harold, editor. *Edward Albee: Modern Critical Views*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987.

Gussow, Mel, *Edward Albee: A Singular Journey*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999.

Kolin, Phillip C., editor. *Conversations with Edward Albee*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1988.

Roudane, Matthew C. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?: Necessary Fictions, Terrifying Realities*. Twayne Masterwork Series. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990.



Websites

www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/alb1int-1

A June 2005 video/audio interview with and biography of Edward Albee on the Academy of Achievement site.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2004/jan/10/theatre>

A 2004 interview with the playwright on the website for the British newspaper, *The Guardian*.

Film and Video

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? directed by Mike Nichols (Warner Brothers, 1966). Starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor (who was very young for the role) as George and Martha, the film was controversial for its profanity but was nominated for 13 Academy Awards and won five, including a Best Actress Oscar for Taylor.