

# Decision Education Foundation English Curriculum

## A Jury of Her Peers

by Susan Glaspell

### Unit Snapshot

<b><i>Designed For</i></b>	High School Students
<b><i>Essential Questions</i></b>	Do women and men view the world differently and how does gender affect decision making? How do I balance “head” and “heart” in decision making? Why are feelings just as important as rational thought in making important decisions? Are biases innate or learned?
<b><i>Content and Skill Focus</i></b>	Decision Topics <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Framing a decision well leads to finding the best alternatives and information for the situation</li><li>• Feelings can be as important as logic in good decision making</li><li>• Ignorance of our biases can lead to limiting the frame of a situation</li><li>• Decision fitness leads to making good choices</li><li>• A decision results in action</li></ul> English Topics <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attention to detail leads to successful literary analysis</li><li>• Use of irony in literature</li><li>• Narrative point of view</li><li>• Clear writing includes pertinent detail not <i>all</i> information available</li></ul>
<b><i>Expected Outcomes</i></b>	Students will be able to <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• explain the men and women’s different points of view</li><li>• identify Glaspell’s narrative techniques</li><li>• discuss irony and perspective</li><li>• evaluate characters’ decisions in the story</li></ul>
<b><i>Kinds of Assessment</i></b>	Performance Tasks : Court Room Closing Statement Journal Assignment Essay on men’s and women’s views Five decision skill class exercises
<b><i>Time Required</i></b>	Seven class periods
<b><i>Comments</i></b>	Because of the significant choices women make in the story and the men’s limited perspective, decision analysis provides a helpful way to clarify important issues in this murder mystery.

(Version 7)

# Overview

**General Description:** In addition to helping students read and analyze “A Jury of Her Peers,” this unit for students in grades 11-12 explores the use of frames in decision situations, the influence of information on perspective, the importance of being fit to make a decision, and the limiting effect of biases.

**Duration:** The unit is designed for seven periods and additional time out of class for students to complete an essay assignment. Teachers can adjust the duration according to the activities selected.

**Summary and Decision Perspective:** “A Jury of Her Peers” is the short story version of Susan Glaspell’s play, *Trifles*. Glaspell (1882-1948) originally wrote the piece for the Provincetown Players, and it was first published as a story in 1917—before women had the right to vote or serve on a jury. The lonely Midwestern farm setting is most likely located in Iowa where the author lived the first thirty-two years of her life. Glaspell also commented that the work was inspired by an experience she had while working for a Des Moines newspaper.<sup>1</sup>

The story is a murder mystery: Mrs. Wright (formerly known as Minnie Foster) is accused of killing her husband and is already in jail at the start of the story—and there are no other suspects. Mystery and suspense derive from the interaction of characters as they investigate the crime scene. All of the action takes place at the Wrights’ farm, and Mr. Peters, the sheriff, Mr. Hale, the neighbor who discovered the body the previous day, and Mr. Henderson, the county attorney, examine the scene for evidence to determine the motive of the murder: if he can explain *why* the farmer’s wife killed her husband, the county attorney will have a better chance of convicting Mrs. Wright in court. Accompanied by Mrs. Hale, Mrs. Peters, the sheriff’s wife, is there to collect items Mrs. Wright has requested.

While the men explore the house and barn for clues, most of the story focuses on the interaction between the two women who remain in the kitchen: Mrs. Hale soon realizes that isolation plays a significant role in the tragedy, and Mrs. Peters wrestles with her duty to uphold the law and the dawning apprehension that Mrs. Wright is closer to a victim than a culprit. Differences in the perspectives of the men and the women supplants an initial friction between Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters; though absent and in jail, Mrs. Wright becomes a substantial presence in the kitchen as the two women remember her life when she was Minnie Foster and uncover clues about her life with Mr. Wright.

The three women make significant choices and the men approach the murder scene with a narrow perspective. Therefore, decision analysis provides a helpful way to understand the story. Mrs. Wright decides to kill her husband; Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale eventually decide Mrs. Wright should not be convicted and choose to keep evidence from the men; and by ignoring the importance of the women’s world, the men fail to notice essential clues to the mystery. The story provides useful examples to explore the significance of decision fitness, “head and heart,” framing, alternatives, and information in good decision making.

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<sup>1</sup> Arp, Thomas and Greg Johnson. *Perrine’s Literature, Eighth Edition*. Fort Worth: Harcourt College Publishers, 2001. page 406.

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## 2. Learning Plan

### First Class: Introduction

#### Procedures

- Begin with a whole class discussion of the following questions:

#### 1. Does gender make a difference in the way we face challenging situations?

After discussing responses to this question, inform the class that they are about read a story that raises questions about differences between men and women's perceptions of the world.

#### 2. When did women gain the right to vote?

Point out that Susan Glaspell wrote "A Jury of Her Peers" in the early 1900's before women had the right to vote (1920) or serve on juries. See [Web Resources](#) for more background information.

- Begin reading the story out loud to the class. Help them sort out the characters and situation. Explain that as they read, students should keep a list of the decisions characters make.

#### Next Steps

**Homework:** Finish reading the story and note all important decisions that the characters make.

## Second Class: The Murder

### Materials

Performance Task  
Handout 1—Mrs. Wright’s Decision  
Teacher Resource 1—Sample Responses and Teacher Notes for Handout 1  
Journal Entry

### Procedures

- Introduce the **Performance Task**. See **Assessment** for specific instructions.
- Discussion topic: **What are important decisions characters make in this story and who makes them?**  
After noting and discussing student responses, explore the following ideas:
  1. The story revolves around the women’s decisions:
    - a. Mrs. Wright decides to kill her husband and causes all resulting action in the story.
    - b. Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale decide to keep evidence from the men, clues that would result in the suspect’s conviction.
    - c. In hiding what they have discovered, the two women judge Mrs. Wright to be innocent. They decide she does not deserve to be convicted and sentenced.
  2. While the sheriff and county attorney hold positions of power, the women control the important proceedings at the crime scene.
  3. What is the significance of the fact that the story takes place in Mrs. Wright’s kitchen and that the men leave and reenter throughout the story?
- In small groups or individually students complete the first page of **Handout 1**. This exercise is intended to help students analyze Mrs. Wright’s decision—the decision that creates the story. Discuss responses. For sample responses and notes, see **Teacher Resource 1**.
- Give students the second page of **Handout 1**. Use questions to guide a discussion of decision fitness.
- Explain the **Journal Assignment**. See **Assessment** for instructions.

### Next Steps

**Homework:** Students complete the journal entry (see **Assessment**). Remind them that they should only write about incidents that they are willing to share with the class.

## Handout 1. *Mrs. Wright's Decision*

### **Definitions:**

- A decision is a choice between alternatives which results in an action.
- We define good decisions by how we make them—not by the outcome.
- To be effective decision makers, we use both our heads and hearts.
- We need to recognize when we are not fit to make an important decision.

### **What is Mrs. Wright's state of mind when she decides to kill her husband?**

Even though we do not witness the crime, we begin to understand Mrs. Wright's state of mind as Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters uncover clues about the situation. Use the table below to list and analyze details that reveal Mrs. Wright's emotional state before she takes action. List individual details and comment on their significance.

<b>DETAILS</b>	<b>WHAT THEY REVEAL</b>
<i>Example:</i> "Oh—her fruit...She worried about that when it turned so cold last night. She said the fire would go out and her jars might burst."	The fact that Mrs. Wright's main concern in jail is about her jam jars bursting from the cold could be the result of shock OR an indication of how insignificant her relationship has been with her husband—they have grown so distant that she has no feeling for him.

## ***Decision Fitness Requires***

--an awareness that a particular situation or emotional state can render me unfit to make a decision. (*For example, when I am angry at another person, have been hurt by someone I care about, am under the influence of drugs or peer pressure*)

--a willingness, when I am unfit, to postpone the decision or ask someone who is thinking straight to help me.

### ***Group Discussion Topics***

1. When she makes her choice, what is Mrs. Wright's debate with herself? How might an awareness of *decision fitness* help her in that debate? Explain using details you gathered in the table above.
2. What are situations you anticipate this year in which you think decision fitness can help you? How about decisions further in the future?
3. Are there habits to practice or policies to make now that might help you later when you face difficult decision situations?

## Teacher Resource 1. Sample Responses and Teacher Notes for Handout 1

DETAILS	WHAT THEY REVEAL
<i>Example:</i> “Oh—her fruit...She worried about that when it turned so cold last night. She said the fire would go out and her jars might burst.”	The fact that Mrs. Wright’s main concern in jail is about her jam jars bursting from the cold could be the result of shock OR an indication of how insignificant her relationship has been with her husband—they have grown so distant that she has no feeling for him.
Paragraph 25: lives on a lonesome stretch of road; husband is known as someone who does not talk much (does not want a telephone because “people talk too much anyway”); reputation for not caring about what his wife wants	Mrs. W has lived an extremely solitary life for 20 years and we know from Mrs. Hale that as Minnie Foster she was social and loved to sing.
Par. 111: “What had interrupted Minnie Foster?”	Things left half done is unusual and therefore strange behavior for Mrs. Wright.
Par. 120: Mr. Wright stingy; Mrs. W’s shabbiness kept her from socializing and enjoyment	Circumstances and hardships lead her to feel sadness and loneliness—opposite of her life before marriage: knowing the difference is painful.
Par 165-175: the extremely badly sewn newest section on a quilt	The sewing evidence reveals that Mrs. W. was agitated to distraction and could not concentrate on her sewing
Par. 182-195, 215-228—Broken bird cage, dead bird in box in sewing basket	Mrs. W debates whether or not she can continue living with her husband’s harsh treatment. His killing her one joy in life—the company and song of a canary—is an action that clearly leads her to a final decision about her situation.

## Third Class: Frames

### Materials

Handout 2—Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale’s Decision  
Teacher Resource 2—Sample Responses for Handout 2  
Handout 3—Narrative Techniques as a Means of Defining Perspective

### Procedures

- After a few volunteers share their journal entries, collect the homework.
- Use **Handout 2** to define frames and explore Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale’s decision. Refer to **Teacher Resource 2** for sample responses and points to emphasize.
- Introduce the **Essay Assignment** (see **Assessment** for specific guidelines).
- Give students copies of **Handout 3** and complete the first page (pre-writing exercise for the essay assignment).

### Next Steps

**Homework:** Students complete **Handout 3**. Note responses to discussion questions.

**Handout 2. *Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale’s Decision***

***Frames in Decision Making***

- We clarify decisions by defining the frame.
- The frame is our purpose, scope, and perspective in a given situation.
- To frame a situation well we use both head and heart.

**Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale’s perspectives change as the story progresses. Use the table below to define their frames of the situation at the beginning of the story. List details that help us define the two women’s perspectives.**

<b>Mrs. Peters</b>	<b>Mrs. Hale</b>
<p><i>Example:</i>  <b>Detail:</b> “Of course it’s no more than their duty,’ said the sheriff’s wife, in her manner of timid acquiescence.” (paragraph 106)  <b>Perspective:</b> Takes the men’s view when Mrs. Hale challenges their criticism of Mrs. Wright’s kitchen</p>	<p><b>Detail:</b> “Time and time again it had been in her mind, ‘I ought to go over and see Minnie Foster.’” (paragraph 9)  <b>Perspective:</b> Still views Mrs. Wright as Minnie Foster—the young woman of 20 yrs ago. Notices the drastic change in her circumstances and feels guilt for not visiting her before this trip to her house.</p>
<p><b>Detail:</b>   <b>Perspective:</b></p>	<p><b>Detail:</b>   <b>Perspective:</b></p>
<p><b>Detail:</b>   <b>Perspective:</b></p>	<p><b>Detail:</b>   <b>Perspective:</b></p>
<p><b>Detail:</b>   <b>Perspective:</b></p>	<p><b>Detail:</b>   <b>Perspective:</b></p>

## Teacher Resource 2. Sample Responses and Notes for Handout 2

Mrs. Peters	Mrs. Hale
<p><b>Example:</b>  <b>Detail:</b> “‘Of course it’s no more than their duty,’ said the sheriff’s wife, in her manner of timid acquiescence.” (paragraph 106)  <b>Perspective:</b> Takes the men’s view when Mrs. Hale challenges their criticism of Mrs. Wright’s kitchen</p>	<p><b>Detail:</b> “Time and time again it had been in her mind, ‘I ought to go over and see Minnie Foster.’” (paragraph 9)  <b>Perspective:</b> Still views Mrs. W. as Minnie Foster—the young woman of 20 years ago. Notice the drastic change in her circumstances and feels guilt for not visiting her before this trip to her house.</p>
<p><b>Detail:</b> “But Mrs. Hale...the law is the law.” (par. 145)  <b>Perspective:</b> When Mrs. Hale again expresses sympathy for Mrs. Wright, Mrs. Peters speaks from the logical male perspective and lives up to the attorney’s later joke about her being “married to the law.”</p>	<p><b>Detail:</b> “Well, I don’t think she did it.” (paragraph 134)  <b>Perspective:</b> Begins with the frame that Mrs. Wright is innocent; led by her feelings for Minnie Foster</p>
<p><b>Detail:</b> “Of course they’ve got awful important things on their minds.” (par. 161)  <b>Perspective:</b> When Mrs. Hale is insulted by the way the men laugh at the “ways of women,” Mrs. Peters again uses her reason and supports the male perspective.</p>	<p><b>Detail:</b> “Well I don’t see any signs of anger around here...” (paragraph 141)  <b>Perspective:</b> First looks at kitchen with assumption of innocence</p>
<p><b>Detail:</b> “I don’t think we ought to touch things.” (par. 170)  <b>Perspective:</b> From Mrs. Peters’ perspective Mrs. Hale is wrong to cover up evidence by pulling out bad stitching in Mrs. Wright’s sewing.</p>	<p><b>Detail:</b> “I sew awful queer sometimes when I’m just tired.” (par. 176)  <b>Perspective:</b> Mrs. Hale looks at the situation through the frame of innocence and seeks to arrange facts accordingly.</p>

**Note:** One way to understand the difference between the two women’s early perspectives is to see that Mrs. Hale faces the situation mostly through her feelings (heart) and Mrs. Peters through her reason (head). It is natural for Mrs. Hale to feel for Mrs. Wright because she knew the woman when she was the lively Minnie Foster, she is her neighbor, and she feels sorry that she never paid attention to her neighbor during the twenty years of Mrs. Wright’s marriage. (She eventually states that her lack of concern for Mrs. Wright, is the “real crime.” Had she visited the lonely woman from time to time, this tragedy might not have occurred.) It is also natural for Mrs. Peters to be more rational: she is involved only because she is the wife of the sheriff, her information comes from him, and she never knew Minnie Foster.

### Points to emphasize:

1. We all approach the world with particular frames defined by experience, social setting, talents, and culture, and we need to be aware that these preconceptions sometimes create traps and biases that affect the quality of our decision making.
2. To free ourselves to look at a situation objectively, we need to be open to choosing the right frame for the situation—even if it is one we are not used to.
3. The most helpful frames in a decision situation take into account both logic and feelings—we need to look carefully at how we and others feel about the situation as well as the facts. As the story progresses and Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale begin to uncover evidence and understand each other’s view, they end up with a frame that connects head and heart.

## Handout 3. *Narrative Technique as a Means of Defining Perspective*

### **Narrative Points of View**

**Omniscient:** *author tells the story using the third person, knows all; free to reveal characters' thoughts and explain actions*

**Third-person limited:** *author narrates in third person, but analysis and knowledge is limited to the perspective of one character in the story*

**First Person:** *a character in the story is the narrator and speaks in the first person*

**Objective:** *author narrates in third person, but only tells what characters say and do—no interpretation or inner thoughts of characters*

Explore Glaspell's narrative technique by examining the two passages below and responding to the questions that follow each one.

#### Passage 1

"Well, Mr. Hale," said the county attorney, in a way of letting what was past and gone go, "tell just what happened when you came here yesterday morning."

Mrs. Hale, still leaning against the door, had that sinking feeling of the mother whose child is about to speak a piece. Lewis often wandered along and got things mixed up in a story. She hoped he would tell this straight and plain, and not say unnecessary things that would just make things harder for Minnie Foster. He didn't begin at once, and she noticed that he looked queer--as if standing in that kitchen and having to tell what he had seen there yesterday morning made him almost sick.

"Yes, Mr. Hale?" the county attorney reminded.

"Harry and I had started to town with a load of potatoes," Mrs. Hale's husband began.

Harry was Mrs. Hale's oldest boy. He wasn't with them now, for the very good reason that those potatoes never got to town yesterday and he was taking them this morning, so he hadn't been home when the sheriff stopped to say he wanted Mr. Hale to come over to the Wright place and tell the county attorney his story there, where he could point it all out. With all Mrs. Hale's other emotions came the fear now that maybe Harry wasn't dressed warm enough--they hadn't any of them realized how that north wind did bite.

#### Passage 1 Discussion Topics

1. What is the narrative point of view of the passage above? Evidence?
2. Does the point of view change during the story?
3. Why does Glaspell include the detail about Harry being "dressed warm enough"? How is this detail related to the rest of the story?

## Passage 2

The county attorney was looking at the cupboard--a peculiar, ungainly structure, half closet and half cupboard, the upper part of it being built in the wall, and the lower part just the old-fashioned kitchen cupboard. As if its queerness attracted him, he got a chair and opened the upper part and looked in. After a moment he drew his hand away sticky.

"Here's a nice mess," he said **resentfully**.

The two women had drawn nearer, and now the sheriff's wife spoke.

"Oh--her fruit," she said, **looking to Mrs. Hale for sympathetic understanding**.

She turned back to the county attorney and explained: "She worried about that when it turned so cold last night. She said the fire would go out and her jars might burst."

**Mrs. Peters' husband** broke into a laugh.

"Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder, and worrying about her preserves!"

The young attorney set his lips.

"I guess before we're through with her she may have something more serious than preserves to worry about."

"Oh, well," said **Mrs. Hale's husband**, with **good-natured superiority**, "women are used to worrying over trifles."

**The two women moved a little closer together**. Neither of them spoke. The county attorney seemed suddenly to remember his manners--and think of his future.

"And yet," said he, **with the gallantry of a young politician**. "for all their worries, what would we do without the ladies?"

**The women did not speak, did not unbend**. He went to the sink and began washing his hands. He turned to wipe them on the roller towel--whirled it for a cleaner place.

## Passage 2 Discussion Topics

1. Compare the point of view of passage 1 and 2. Do we enter anyone's mind or heart?

2. Though it may seem insignificant, the language between passages spoken by the characters teaches us about the perspective of a story. Look closely at the language highlighted in **orange** above. What is its effect and does it give the story any particular slant? Explain.

## Fourth Class: Frame Change

### Materials

Handout 4—Explore Mrs. Peters' Frame Change  
Teacher Resource 3. Sample Responses for Handout 4  
Handout 5. Explore Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale's Decision Further

### Procedures

- Review homework responses. Discuss second half of **Handout 3**.
- Work on **Handout 4** (how information causes frame change for Mrs. Peters). Begin by having students work in small groups to gather information and fill in the table. Review findings with the class.
- Give students **Handout 5** and review directions.

### Next Steps

**Homework:** Students complete **Handout 5**.

## Handout 4. *Explore Mrs. Peters' Frame Change*

### ***Useful information in decision making helps us to***

- understand the issue at hand,
- know where to focus our efforts,
- define the alternatives,
- understand the consequences of each alternative,
- enable a switch in ultimate choice with additional or new information.

Notice that Mrs. Peters begins the story with one frame and ends with a different perspective. Her alternatives are to act strictly according to rules of law (the men's perspective) or to redefine her frame of the issues surrounding Mr. Wright's death and sympathize with Mrs. Wright (Mrs. Hale's perspective).

Examine how new information influences Mrs. Peters' view. Locate and discuss places in the story where we see the sheriff's wife question her stance because of new information.

Scene	Explanation
<i>Example:</i> observing the sink and stove (paragraphs 146-150)	Mrs. Hale's comments about the "bad stove" cause Mrs. Peters to begin to see the suspect in a new light: she begins "seeing into things." The change is evident when she says, "A person gets discouraged—and loses heart. She then looks at more details—the sink with no plumbing— and we read, "That look of seeing into things, of seeing through a thing to something else, was in the eyes of the sheriff's wife now." Builds on the motif of "eyes" and "seeing" as representations of understanding and connecting.

### Teacher Resource 3. Sample Responses for Handout 4

Scene	Explanation
<i>Example:</i> observing the sink and stove (paragraphs 146-150)	Mrs. Hale’s comments on the “bad stove” cause Mrs. Peters to begin to see the suspect in a new light: she begins “seeing into things.” The change in her sympathy is evident when she says, “A person gets discouraged—and loses heart.” She then looks at more details—the sink with no plumbing, and we read, “That look of seeing into things, of seeing through a thing to something else, was in the eyes of the sheriff’s wife now.” Builds on the motif of “eyes” and “seeing” as representations of understanding and connecting.
Discovery of broken bird cage (par. 190-199)	“Again their eyes met” as the two women see the broken cage and knowledge of Mr. Wright’s “roughness” begins to dawn on them. Mrs. Peters admits “It would be lonesome for me—sitting here alone.”
Discovery of the dead bird (par. 215-228)	We see Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale move a significant step closer in viewpoint here as they realize someone “wrung the neck” of the bird. “And then again the eyes of the two women met—this time clung together in a look of dawning apprehension, of growing horror.” Their apprehension and horror is a reaction to both the husband’s cruelty and knowledge that Minnie might actually have committed the crime.
Comments on the cat (par. 230-244)	Mrs. Peter’s comment to the men that the cat has disappeared because they are superstitious shows that her perspective has changed to the extent that she has now joined Mrs. Hale in choosing to keep evidence from the men. The memory of the death of her own cat provides her with more convincing information of a personal nature: as she remembers how strongly she felt, she is able to identify with Mrs. Wright’s suffering in a new way.
Losing a baby (par. 250-255)	Her past experience of losing a baby gives her knowledge of what “stillness” feels like and she is able to identify even more closely with Mrs. Wright.

## Handout 5. *Explore Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale's Decision Further*

***A decision is***

***a choice between alternatives that results in action.***

According to the definition above, which of the following are real decisions? If you check "NO," can you revise the statement so that it is a decision?

Example	Yes	No
1. I have decided it is worth pursuing a college education.		
2. Bill decided that he likes prunes for breakfast.		
3. Sally decided to research five colleges on-line.		
4. Bill's mom decided to buy prunes at the Acme.		
5. Mrs. Hale decided that she was not a good neighbor to Minnie.		
6. Mrs. Peters decided that following the law is important.		
7. Mrs. Hale decided Mrs. Wright was innocent.		
8. Mrs. Hale decided to accompany Mrs. Peters to the crime scene.		

Most of Glaspell's story explores the way a bond grows between three women as information about the case comes to light. Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale's decision at the end of the story is the climax of the plot. Their actions reveal a significant frame change as well as their new found connection with Mrs. Wright.

To understand this decision and its effect in the story, turn to the next page, reread the ending, and be ready to discuss the topics that follow.

(Paragraph 289) Hale went to look after the horses. The sheriff followed the county attorney into the other room. Again--for one final moment--the two women were alone in that kitchen.

Martha Hale sprang up, her hands tight together, looking at that other woman, with whom it rested. At first she could not see her eyes, for the sheriff's wife had not turned back since she turned away at that suggestion of being married to the law. But now Mrs. Hale made her turn back. Her eyes made her turn back. Slowly, unwillingly, Mrs. Peters turned her head until her eyes met the eyes of the other woman. There was a moment when they held each other in a steady, burning look in which there was no evasion or flinching. Then Martha Hale's eyes pointed the way to the basket in which was hidden the thing that would make certain the conviction of the other woman--that woman who was not there and yet who had been there with them all through that hour.

For a moment Mrs. Peters did not move. And then she did it. With a rush forward, she threw back the quilt pieces, got the box, tried to put it in her handbag. It was too big. Desperately she opened it, started to take the bird out. But there she broke--she could not touch the bird. She stood there helpless, foolish.

There was the sound of a knob turning in the inner door. Martha Hale snatched the box from the sheriff's wife, and got it in the pocket of her big coat just as the sheriff and the county attorney came back into the kitchen.

"Well, Henry," said the county attorney facetiously, "at least we found out that she was not going to quilt it. She was going to--what is it you call it, ladies?"

Mrs. Hale's hand was against the pocket of her coat.

"We call it--knot it, Mr. Henderson."

### *Discussion Topics*

1. "Slowly, unwillingly, Mrs. Peters turned her head." Why is Mrs. Peters unwilling to look at Mrs. Hale. Explain.
2. Notice the number of times the word "eyes" appears in the passage above (and in the rest of the story). What do "eyes" signify, and why the repetition here?
3. We read that the "other woman" (Mrs. Wright) had been with the them "all through that hour." How is that possible? Explain.
4. Using the definition on the previous page, identify the decisions you see in the passage above. Who makes them? Why? What is the outcome?
5. "We call it--knot it, Mr. Henderson." Why do you think Glaspell concludes her story with this sentence? Explain the significance.

## **Fifth Class: Action and Frames**

### **Materials**

Teacher Resource 4—Sample Responses to Handout 5  
Performance Task

### **Procedures**

- Review homework assignment. Discuss the first page of Handout 5. Then have a volunteer reread the passage, and discuss topics on the second page.
- Give students time in class to begin the **Performance Task**. Explain the details of how they will present, and give them the opportunity to begin writing with teacher present for questions.

### **Next Steps**

**Homework:** Students work on **Performance Task**.

**Teacher Resource 4. Sample Responses to Handout 5** (Paragraph 289) **Hale went to look after the horses. The sheriff followed the county attorney into the other room. Again—for one final moment—the two women were alone in that kitchen.**

Martha Hale sprang up, her hands tight together, looking at that other woman, with whom it rested. At first she could not see her **eyes**, for the sheriff's wife had not turned back since she turned away at that suggestion of being married to the law. But now Mrs. Hale made her turn back. Her **eyes** made her turn back. Slowly, unwillingly, Mrs. Peters turned her head until her **eyes** met the **eyes** of the other woman. There was a moment when they held each other in a steady, burning look in which there was no evasion or flinching. Then Martha Hale's **eyes** pointed the way to the basket in which was hidden the thing that would make certain the conviction of the other woman—that woman who was not there and yet who had been there with them all through that hour.

For a moment Mrs. Peters did not move. And then she did it. With a rush forward, she threw back the quilt pieces, got the box, tried to put it in her handbag. It was too big. Desperately she opened it, started to take the bird out. But there she broke—she could not touch the bird. She stood there helpless, foolish.

There was the sound of a knob turning in the inner door. Martha Hale snatched the box from the sheriff's wife, and got it in the pocket of her big coat just as the sheriff and the county attorney came back into the kitchen.

"Well, Henry," said the county attorney facetiously, "at least we found out that she was not going to quilt it. She was going to--what is it you call it, ladies?"

Mrs. Hale's hand was against the pocket of her coat.

"We call it--knot it, Mr. Henderson."

**1. "Slowly, unwillingly, Mrs. Peters turned her head..." Why is Mrs. Peters unwilling to look at Mrs. Hale. Explain.** (After the reminder that she is "married to the law," Mrs. P. feels her natural responsibility to tell the truth and provide evidence. As she uses the new frame of sympathy for Mrs. W., she has a hard time letting her former perspective go. Also may have some difficulty facing up to the horror of Minnie's life and action.)

**2. Notice the number of times the word "eyes" appears in the passage above (and in the rest of the story). What do "eyes" signify, and why the repetition here?** (Whenever they look at one another – here and in the rest of the story, the two women share an insight about the truth of Mrs. Wright's situation. It is through their eyes that they connect with each other and face the truth. In this story the women "see" more about Mrs. Wright than the men: the men are blind to the "trifles" which turn out to be the most important details about the situation.)

**3. We read that the "other woman" (Mrs. Wright) had been with the them "all through that hour." How is that possible? Explain.** (While in Mrs. W. kitchen, Mrs. P and Mrs. H have uncovered intimate details about "the suspect's" habits and actions—both past and present. By "walking in her shoes," they come to know her life and recognize the common needs all human beings share for compassion and companionship. Mrs. H says earlier in the story, "We live close together, and we live far apart. We all go through the same things—it's all just a different kind of same thing! If it weren't—why do you and I *understand*? Why do we *know*—what we know this minute?"

**4. Using the definition on the previous page, identify the decisions you see in the passage above. Who makes them? Why? What is the outcome?** (Notice that BOTH women make the decision: their actions confirm their unity and Mrs. P's frame change—as well as their sympathetic connection with Mrs. W.)

**5. "We call it—knot it, Mr. Henderson." Why do you think Glaspell concludes her story with this sentence? Explain the significance.** (Repeated motif and detail; men joke about women's concern about quilt, and Mrs. W's "knotting" applies to quilt and husband.)

## Sixth Class: Concluding Exercise and Discussion

### Materials

Handout 6—More on Frames  
Teacher Resource 5. Sample Responses for Handout 6

### Procedures

- Use **Handout 6** as a summative class exercise and discussion. Have students fill in the table.
- Discuss student responses. Refer to **Teacher Resource 4** for sample responses and points to emphasize.

### Next Steps

- **Homework:** Students work on **Performance Task** and **Essay Assignment**.
- **Seventh and Eighth Classes:** (1) Students deliver their closing statements (**Performance Task**). (2) Remind students of the due date for the essay.

## Handout 6. *More on Frames: How Glaspell uses Irony to Identifies the Different Perspectives of Men and Women in "A Jury of Her Peers"*

Explore the significance of the passages and situations below by identifying any ironies you see and explaining what it reveals about different perspectives of the men and women.

Passage	Irony and Perspective
<p>"Nothing here but kitchen things," he said with a little laugh for the insignificance of kitchen things. (par. 67)</p>	
<p>"Ah, loyal to your sex, I see," he laughed. He stopped and gave her a keen look. "But you and Mrs. Wright were neighbors. I suppose you were friends too." (par. 85)</p>	
<p>"Of course Mrs. Peters is one of us," he said in a manner of entrusting responsibility. "And keep an eye out, Mrs. Peters, for anything that might be of use. No telling; you women might come upon a clue to the motive—and that is the thing we need." (par.100)</p>	
<p>"They wonder whether she was going to quilt it or just knot it!" There was a laugh for the ways of women. (par. 158)            "Of course they've got awful important things on their minds," the sheriff's wife said apologetically. (par. 161)</p>	
<p>"We think," began the sheriff's wife in a flurried voice, "that she was going to—knot it." He was too preoccupied to notice the change that came in her voice on the last.            "Well, that's very interesting, I'm sure," he said tolerantly. (par. 229-232)</p>	
<p>The county attorney picked up the apron. He laughed.            "Oh, I guess they're not very dangerous things the ladies have picked out." (par. 278-9)</p>	
<p>"Well, Henry," said the county attorney facetiously, "at least we found out that she was not going to quilt it. She was going to--what is it you call it, ladies?"            Mrs. Hale's hand was against the pocket of her coat. "We call it--knot it, Mr. Henderson." 295</p>	

## Teacher Resource 5. Sample Responses for Handout 6

Glaspell uses **irony** to develop the different perspectives of the men and women in the story. Explore the significance of the passages and situations below by identifying the irony and explaining what it reveals about different perspectives of the men and women.

Passage	Irony and Perspective
<p>“Nothing here but kitchen things,” [the sheriff] said with a little laugh for the insignificance of kitchen things. (par. 67)...</p> <p>“Oh, well,” said Mrs. Hale’s husband with good-natured superiority, “women are used to worrying over trifles.” (par. 76)</p>	<p>Central irony here is that the two men view the women’s place—the kitchen—as unimportant, and it is the women who find the most important clues among the “insignificance of kitchen things.” The men’s frame excludes the “trifles” in the kitchen, and they are all unsuccessful as a result (even Mr. Wright). “Trifles” is Glaspell’s original title.</p>
<p>“Ah, loyal to your sex, I see,” he laughed. He stopped and gave her a keen look. “But you and Mrs. Wright were neighbors. I suppose you were friends too.” (par. 85)</p>	<p>The attorney’s “keen look” suggests that thinks he might get evidence for a motive from Mrs. Hale because she was Mrs. Wright’s neighbor and friend. The irony is that this statement causes Mrs. Hale to see her own part in the crime because she was not a true friend to her neighbor.</p>
<p>“Of course Mrs. Peters is one of us,” he said in a manner of entrusting responsibility. “And keep an eye out, Mrs. Peters, for anything that might be of use. No telling; you women might come upon a clue to the motive—and that is the thing we need.” (par.100)</p>	<p>The attorney’s continued condescending attitude toward the women is ironic because they pay attention to trifles and become the authorities on the situation: the attorney’s frame is narrow and includes only a motive for the crime. By using the women’s frame, he would consider the more important human issues behind the simple motive.</p>
<p>“They wonder whether she was going to quilt it or just knot it!” There was a laugh for the ways of women. (par. 158)</p> <p>“Of course they’ve got awful important things on their minds,” the sheriff’s wife said apologetically. (par. 161)</p>	<p>Again the condescending attitude is ironic. Mrs. Peter’s statement is also ironic because the women end up having the most important things on their minds: real clues, discovered motive (dead bird), the larger picture of reasons behind motive—not just what is here and now, the recognition of what it means to be a real neighbor</p>
<p>“We think,” began the sheriff’s wife in a flurried voice, “that she was going to—knot it.” He was too preoccupied to notice the change that came in her voice on the last.</p> <p>“Well, that’s very interesting, I’m sure,” he said tolerantly. (par. 229-232)</p>	<p>The irony is that the attorney is so preoccupied that he misses an important clue right in front of him (Mrs. Peters’ “flurried voice”): because his frame excludes the women’s world, he fails to see the complete picture and discover significant clues. Again a tone of condescension.</p>
<p>The county attorney picked up the apron. He laughed.</p> <p>“Oh, I guess they’re not very dangerous things the ladies have picked out.” (par. 278-9)</p>	<p>He laughs at the women, but we laugh at him: the women have picked out THE MOST DANGEROUS THINGS in the kitchen: the evidence that leads to a motive and conviction.</p>
<p>"Well, Henry," said the county attorney facetiously, "at least we found out that she was not going to quilt it. She was going to--what is it you call it, ladies?"</p> <p>Mrs. Hale's hand was against the pocket of her coat. "We call it--knot it, Mr. Henderson." 295</p>	<p>Because he does not consider the women’s world as significant and continues to make fun of them, the attorney cannot see clues that are in front of him. The irony is that the quilt reveals Mrs. W.’s state of mind, and Mrs. Hale faces him with the most important piece of the puzzle in her pocket—the dead bird which is the key to why Mrs. Wright “knotted” not only her quilt but also her husband’s neck.</p>

***The historical cultural bias that what women’s intellectual skills are solely connected to the kitchen and that the kitchen is insignificant leads the men to narrowly limit their perspective and miss important information.***

## 2. Assessment

### Performance Task: Court Room Closing Statement

**Goal:** Write and deliver your closing statement in the trial of Mrs. Wright.

**Role:** You choose the role of EITHER the prosecuting OR defense attorney.

**Audience:** You will deliver your statement to the class who will serve as the jury.

**Situation:** Time has passed since the events of the story took place, and Mrs. Wright is nearing the end of her trial. You have participated in the proceedings in the role of prosecutor or defense attorney, and it is now time for you to deliver your final statement to the jury. (While lawyers often find themselves having to make an argument they do not necessarily believe themselves, you should pick your role according to whether or not you think Mrs. Wright should be convicted of murder.)

**Product:** A three-five minute closing argument to the jury and a written transcript of your speech.

#### Standards for Success:

- ***Creativity and Imagination.*** While it is important that the details of your argument are consistent with the story, you have the freedom to invent witnesses and refer to statements and evidence that you imagine have surfaced during the trial.
- ***Specific Detail.*** Use convincing details in your argument, details that are consistent with the information we have from the story.
- ***Engaging Delivery.*** Pay attention to the way you deliver your statement as well as what you say. Where should you pause? speed up? use a gesture? While you can read your argument, consider memorizing it so that you can concentrate on a convincing delivery.
- ***Thoughtful Analysis.*** Make sure your argument draws specific conclusions about both Mrs. Wright's decision and the testimony and evidence presented in court.

## Journal Assignment

Discuss an example of when you wish you had postponed a decision you made. Why weren't you "decision fit"? What are situations you anticipate in the next month, year, five years, in which you think decision fitness can help you?

OR

When she makes her choice, is Mrs. Wright *fit to make the decision* about how to react to her husband? Explain using details you gathered from class discussion and the table in *Learning Resources a*.

## Essay Assignment

### *Discuss the relevance of men and women's views in "A Jury of Her Peers"*

*The following questions are intended to help you narrow the topic. You need not answer all of them—use the questions to help you to explore your particular interests and define a clear argument.*

- What exactly is the difference between the way the men and women view Mrs. Wright's situation?
- How does Glaspell define perspective through irony and narrative technique?
- What part does the men's bias play in the story (including Mr. Wright)?
- What is your opinion of Mrs. Wright's decision?
- What is your opinion of Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale's decisions?
- Is Glaspell's purpose in the story simply to criticize men, or does she have a larger, more widely important point?

### 3. Resources on the Web

#### --Annenberg Media: Learner.org

<http://www.learner.org/exhibits/literature/story/fulltext.html>

Electronic version of “A Jury of Her Peers” which students can print for class.

<http://www.learner.org/exhibits/literature/>

Helpful resources on the elements of short stories (plot, character, theme, point of view) as well as background on Glaspell and the story. Includes useful links to other resources.

#### --Background Information on Women’s Rights

<http://www.betterworldlinks.org/book41zh.htm>

Suffragettes and Women’s Right to Vote: useful links to a wealth of information

<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/conlaw/nineteenth.htm>

Exploring Constitutional Conflicts—Women’s Fight for the Vote: The Nineteenth Amendment

[http://womenshistory.about.com/od/suffrage1900/a/august\\_26\\_wed.htm](http://womenshistory.about.com/od/suffrage1900/a/august_26_wed.htm)

About: Women’s History, August 26, 1920. Summary of the event. Includes an interesting statement (and possible writing topic on perspective) entitled “Why We Don’t Want Men to Vote” written by Alice Duer Miller in 1915

#### --Politics and Farm Life in Iowa

<http://publications.iowa.gov/archive/00000135/01/history/7-1.html>

*History of Iowa*, by Dorothy Schwieder, professor of history, Iowa State University. For sections that provide pertinent background information for the story, scroll down to “**Political Arena**” and then to “**The Family Farm.**”