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1986 Volume I: The Family in Literature

Literature As A Mirror of Reality: The Family In Historical and Sociological Perspectives

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Introduction

What is family? How are families portrayed in literature? Our unit “Literature As A Mirror of Reality: The Family In Historical and Sociological Perspectives” will attempt to give some insight into these questions. We would like our students to get a sense of what family is. This unit will have three parts.

First, we will present a historical framework which will be used to explore how families from early times to contemporary times acted and were changed by the forces of society.

Secondly, we will examine three modern plays concerning family issues in order to add some color, relevance, and substance to our historical framework.

The final third of our unit will concentrate specifically on our students and their families. In this section we will involve our students in writing about their own families, generating autobiographies, short stories, and poems from their own experiences.

The first third of our unit, the historical framework, will use several books pertaining to the history of the family (Stone’s “The Family, Sex, And Marriage in England 1500-1800, Ariés’s “Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life,” Ozment’s “When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe”) . These books will be supplemented by several articles relating to this subject, including Stone’s “Family History in The 1900’s: past Achievement and Future Trends”. These selections will be used as resources to develop lectures, presentations, and study units for the students.

Obviously, the study of family in historical terms is an enormous undertaking. This historical framework will not attempt on any level to produce a definitive exploration of an institution so varied and complex. Considering the selections we will use for our historical background, we will not attempt to cover all or even most of the information included but rather select and emphasize certain aspects we feel will lend themselves to an enjoyable and relevant teaching situation.

We do hope to touch on many of the dynamics involved with family in our focused overview, hoping to impart some sense of the evolution, complexity, and richness involved. This framework will concentrate mainly on

four aspects relating to family, the first three dealing with the family in history and the final aspect with contemporary family issues.

The historical framework will first explore the issues of affection within the family, considering initially the family as a match of spouses and their relationship to each other. This will then lead to those issues surrounding the sense of affection displayed toward the children of the family, essentially the parent-child relationship.

Secondly, the unit will discuss the meaning of children and how society and family began to change from premodern times to the present in their consideration of children.

Thirdly, the unit will explore the patriarchal role in the family and the emergence of the women in the marriage/ family unit together with the subsequent rise of the companionate marriage.

The final exploration will be viewed from a more contemporary point of reference, namely the effects of those forces upon families (poverty, prejudice, changing values, etc.) which either weaken and pull families apart or strengthen and solidify them.

While our historical family exploration will concentrate on the European family, we will attempt to offer some insight into the collection of families that make up contemporary American society, notably Black and Latin American families.

After having explored the concept of family in both broad and specifically historical terms, the second third of the unit will attempt to accomplish two objectives. First, we hope that the collection of readings we have selected will help our students develop a more indepth understanding of family. The books we have chosen to study are *Death of A Salesman* , *A Raisin In The Sun* , and *The Oxcart* . We have chosen plays as opposed to short stories or novels because we feel plays offer a unique and easy opportunity for following and studying the characters, lend themselves to group oral reading, and offer possibilities for dramatization within the classroom (which is not only enjoyable but gives the students a greater insight into the characters and themes). These readings will be used to discuss the modern family across various cultures and times, and serve as a basis for comparing and contrasting the modern family to families of the past.

The second objective, apart from the study of family issues, is to offer our students an opportunity for an appreciation of literature for its own sake: good writing, well-developed story, richly detailed characters, and content that goes beyond family to address a great range of human issues.

The final third of our unit will concentrate on our own students and their families. Our attempt will be to draw on the study of the history of the family and our readings in modern literature to give our students a conceptual framework for thinking more precisely about their own families, and give them ways of exploring their thoughts. We would like to guide our students through the process of creative writing, having them think in terms of their own families, and possibly develop their own experiences into short stories, simple autobiographies, and poems. We feel this will serve to increase our students' understanding of the theme of family in general and their families in particular, and give them a chance to develop their own writing talents by expressing themselves on a theme of great relevance to them.

As we work, live, and participate in a thousand different tasks with our students, we deal with them as both individuals and in groups. We attempt to help them grow in their individuality while retaining that importance of belonging to and working with others. We want to impart to them our feelings of love, responsibility,

accomplishment, humor, independence, connectedness, and critical thinking while drawing from them the spontaneity, innocence, and insight that are uniquely the domain of children. Hopefully, we do not impose our value system on our students at the diminishment of their own, but rather help them clarify their emerging values as they begin to approach life as critical thinkers.

Every day our students bring into the classroom their sense of their own families. They do this unconsciously; it's so much a part of their lives they almost never step outside of it or think about it critically. Yet, when they do have the opportunity to discuss family issues, whether it be their own or the idea of family in general, they are fascinated by it.

Our unit was developed with our unique class composition and class schedule in mind. Our students include 6th, 7th, and 8th graders who for the majority of the school day receive all their academic instruction from the same teacher. We envision teaching this unit over the course of two marking periods, using both our reading/language arts classes as well as our history classes to present and discuss the material. Obviously, not all teachers have this flexibility, and it would therefore seem reasonable for teachers interested in this unit to adapt it to their own unique teaching situations.

History of The Family

The investigation of history is never as neatly organized nor as unified as we might hope. Like members from the same family who reveal different realities about their family, historians offer us their evidence about the same phenomenon from different viewpoints, emphasizing those characteristics which provide a logical framework for their study. Truth is not always to be found in one scholarly study, particularly in a phenomenon as rich and as complex as the historical study of family, but in the study of several points of view, trying to locate where those points coincide or where one point has more logic or sense to it. That families have changed over the course of time, and that society's view of children has developed to something different than what it once was, is beyond question. What needs to be answered is how much change has occurred and what were the changes?

Affection Within The Family

Lawrence Stone argues that there is a dramatic difference—between our modern family and the family of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries regarding legal arrangements, structure, custom, power, affection and sex. ¹

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, relations between spouses were often fairly remote. Living arrangements, particularly of the richer families, were often separate within the house, with husband and wife occupying separate bedrooms. ² Stone emphasizes that marriages were usually arranged rather than consensual, essentially the products of economic deals or political alliances between two families. This transaction was sealed by the wedding and by the physical union of the two individuals, while the emotional ties were left to develop at a later date. ³

Steven Ozment in his book *When Fathers Ruled* feels this view of the premodern marriage is too cold and calculating. He cites evidence that agrees with Stone concerning the parents' active involvement in selecting marriages. However, he also indicates that the law, the parents, and the churches worked toward an ideal compromise (not forcing children against their will into marriage, respecting a child's freedom and wishes) while at the same time appreciating a parent's legitimate self interest in the marriage. As Ozment states, "the official concern was to reconcile love and gain. ⁴

Stone obviously places particular importance on the monetary and property value of the early marriage. Ozment, while not rejecting this aspect, goes on to emphasize that early marriages did indeed include love. While one may argue the various points concerning the occurrence of affection in marriages (was it a prerequisite; did it develop after marriage, etc.) it is clear that affection was not the primary motivator in initiating many marriages, but rather a concern somewhat less equal than family interest.

One argument for lack of affection in marriages during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the high adult mortality rate. This severely reduced the companionship element, and increased its purely reproductive and nurturance functions. There was less than a fifty-fifty chance that the husband and wife would both remain alive more than a year or two after the departure from the home of the last child, so that affection was hardly necessary. ⁵ Stone argues strongly that despite the arranged marriages for financial purposes, and the high adult mortality rate, marriages during this period may not have worked out too badly. The expectation of love, long life, and intense happiness during these times appears to have been much reduced in comparison to today's intensified expectations, and as Stone says, "In a low-affect society, a low-affect marriage is often perfectly satisfactory." ⁶

Ozment agrees that there is a distinct difference between early modern marriages and modern marriages. Yet, unlike Stone's somewhat harsh view of no-affect or low-affect in premodern marriages, Ozment argues for affection in premodern marriages, but of a different kind than that which motivates most modern marriages. He feels that physical attraction and emotional love were not viewed as essential conditions for marriage, though they played a role; the love that drew husband and wife together was a mutual willingness to make sacrifices for one another; a duty that developed within the marriage.⁷

Some scholars feel relations between parent and child during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were also fairly remote. They attribute this to the very high infant and child mortality rates; possibly as many as one-third to one-half of all children died by age five. ⁸ They agree that parents simply could not invest considerable affection in children who would probably not be alive for any length of time.

Ozment disagrees with this viewpoint, citing the indepth writings of two men (a respected physician and an influential theologian) concerning child birth, child care, and general childhood medicine during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. ⁹ To Ozment, the very sympathetic and detailed manner in which these books were written is proof that a positive and strong parental affection did exist in the premodern family in Europe.

Scholars cite another reason for lack of affection between parents and children. Parents generally saw very little of their children because of the common practice of "fostering out" children. Many of the middle and upper class parents sent their babies to wet-nurses at birth for twelve to eighteen months. The child re-entered the home only after he had survived the first extremely dangerous months of life elsewhere. After this period these children were mainly brought up by nurses, governesses, and tutors. Beyond this, children of an average age of ten were sent off to boarding school. ¹⁰

The poorer classes also sent their children out of the home. Between the ages of ten and seventeen, these children were sent off to work as domestic servants, laborers, or apprentices. These children did not live at home, but in the master's house. As a result of being sent out to work, children from the ages of puberty until they married some ten years later were living away from home. This accounted for about two out of every three boys and three out of every four girls. ¹¹

Consequently, both upper and lower classes saw very little of their children. This created a climate which did

not promote strong affective relationships between parent and child. The family was held together, not by affection but by shared economic interests.

Between 1600 and 1800, there took place a change in affective relations between parents and children. Exactly why views changed is open to question. As with all advances of philosophy and ways of behavior, a time comes when society is simply more inclined to accept a new way of doing things. One important reason for this change may have been the beginning of the era of falling infant mortality rates, which began around 1750. ¹² The reasoning is that if children lived longer, the chances for parental affection would have more potential for developing.

During the seventeenth century, political and religious changes occurred in Europe which gave way to an overall more relaxed and tolerant atmosphere throughout society. John Locke in England, in his influential views concerning education and child-rearing practices, argued against parental coldness and distance from children. Locke stressed the values of psychological manipulation as opposed to physical punishment, and he generally set a tone for an affectionate, less repressive way of raising children. ¹³ Locke's writings coincided with the overthrow of Divine Right monarchy, the rejection of the Doctrine of Passive Obedience, the granting of limited religious toleration, and the passage of the Bill of Rights. ¹⁴ Society, at least in England, was becoming more open and less authoritarian, opening up new possibilities for more informality and affection between parent and child.

Beyond doubt, society became more child-oriented during the eighteenth century. Although all the reasons for this change are not always evident, the results are obvious. This can be evidenced by the following: the elimination of the practice of naming several children within a family with the same first name (insure the transmission of the name should an elder sibling die), the profusion of published books with specific detail to children's themes, the development of educational games that combined instruction with fun, the proliferation of toy shops, the elimination of the use of restrictive swaddling clothes for infants, the growing popularity of informal, happy family portraits, the fading away of the formality of manners between children and parents, and the abandonment of wetnursing together with the increasing popularity of mothers breast feeding their own children. ¹⁵

This new and developing concern for a more relaxed, and more overtly affectionate attitude signals the modern era, where affection between parents, their children, and all members of the family is considered healthy and good.

Childhood: Society's and Families' Changing View

The concept of childhood has changed from medieval times to the present, paralleling, and very much a part of, the growth of affection within the family. The warm and affectionate feeling we take for granted today concerning the special needs and uniqueness of childhood has not always prevailed.

Childhood, that particular time in life that distinguishes the child from the adult, was not part of the medieval awareness.

Phillipe Ariés in his book *Centuries of Childhood* points out that prior to the seventeenth century, the words child and childhood had different meanings than they do today. The word child and the idea of childhood were bound up with the idea of dependence. One could leave childhood only by leaving the state of dependence. Especially in the lower, more dependent classes, childhood meant men of humble rank whose submission to others remained absolute. ¹⁶ Child was also a term used to mean friendship or flatter someone. At the same

time, specifically in families of higher status, where dependence was only a consequence of physical infirmity, the term child and the idea of childhood, referred to the years of life from one to seven. This use became more frequent in the seventeenth century and began to develop the meaning as we use it today. ¹⁷ As a final point about language and childhood, Ariés states that even during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the English word 'baby' denoted a child of school age, and even into the nineteenth century, the French had to borrow the English term 'baby' (bébé) because they had no word to denote a child in its first months of life. ¹⁸

Other indicators that premodern society attached little distinction to the age of childhood can be seen in art. In medieval art until the twelfth century, childhood was not known nor was it portrayed. As Ariés says, "a painter would not hesitate to give the naked body of a child the musculature of an adult." ¹⁹ This method of depicting children as little adults was the prevailing method, with some variations, even into the thirteenth century. It wasn't until the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that art began to reflect children as having distinctly childlike qualities. ²⁰

The important age for the emergence of evolutionary ideas concerning special themes of childhood is the seventeenth century. Again, using art as a reflection of society, Ariés points out that it is only in the late seventeenth century that we begin to see the predominance of the family portrait planned specifically around the child. ²¹

Children prior to the seventeenth century essentially dressed like little grown-ups. It was during the seventeenth century that children began to wear clothing especially designed for them, and set them apart from adults. ²²

Another important clue that society was beginning to see childhood as a distinct period was in the quantity of children's books published between 1750 and 1814. These books were becoming less concerned with moral themes and were written merely to amuse. Coupled with these new types of amusing books was the proliferation of the educational games that combined instruction with fun, as well as the rapidly growing toy trade. ²³

Medieval children began school at a much later age than modern children. They began their schooling at about the age of ten, whereas the modern child begins at about the age of five or six. Until the twelfth century approximately, a pupil probably stayed in school not much beyond age fourteen. As a university system developed, it was more common to remain with schooling till the age of twenty. ²⁴

In the medieval school all the ages were mixed together in the same classroom. Ariés cites this phenomenon as indicative of the medieval mind's lack of differentiation between and indifference to age; as he says, "As soon as he started going to school, the child immediately entered the world of adults." ²⁵ It wasn't until the eighteenth century that schools began the separation of children into specific classes based on age.

Discipline as a device for control and punishment in the schools was very hard during the period from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries. All children and youths were subject to the disciplinary system of being physically punished and humiliated. ²⁶

Up to the sixteenth century there was no real concept of childhood. Through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there emerged in society two concepts of childhood.

The first concept held that because of the sweetness and simplicity of children, the child's main purpose was

for the amusement and relaxation of the adult. ²⁷ Whereas in earlier times, parents never expressed their feelings concerning children's antics, people in the seventeenth century didn't hesitate to express their feeling of affection. This attitude became known as 'coddling'. This coddling was expressed by fussing over children, caressing them, spoiling them, and generally allowing children to perform antics for adult entertainment.

Many seventeenth-century moralists and pedagogues had an intense dislike for 'coddling'. Their voice gave rise to the second concept of childhood. They felt that parent's coddling and permissive attitude accounted for the presence in society of so many mercenaries, murderers, and criminals. ²⁸ These moralists and pedagogues expressed their view of the specialness of childhood not in 'coddling' but in psychological interest and moral solicitude. ²⁹ This idea is summed up in a quote from Balthazar Gratien in a treatise published in 1646. Gratien writes, "Every man must be conscious of that insipidity of childhood which disgusts the sane minds; that coarseness of youth which finds pleasure in scarcely anything but material objects and which is only a very crude sketch of the man of thought." ³⁰ Steven Ozment supports this claim in his assertion that the cardinal sin of Reformation Europe was the willful indulgence of children, and that too many parents thought childhood was only a time for fun and joy. These moralists were eager to ensure discipline and rational manners in children.

A new concern gradually developed about education and transformed society. The family ceased to be simply an institution for the transmission of a name and an estate; it assumed a moral and emotional function. ³¹ Over time parents took a different view of children. Parents began to expend more care on their children and this inspired new feeling and a new emotional attitude during the seventeenth century and became the basis for the modern concept of family. Parents who had previously set up only a few of their children at the neglect of others, now were beginning to give all their children, not just the eldest, a training for life. The traditional apprenticeship was replaced finally by school. This new school of the seventeenth century was a consequence of the new interest taken by parents in their children's education. Family and school together removed the child from the adult society.

Though these schools were very strict and relied heavily on discipline, it must be understood that they indeed marked the beginning of a serious and realistic concept of childhood. These schools, which grew out of the concept of childhood espoused by the seventeenth-century moralists, stressed that people should not accept the levity of childhood. In order to correct the behavior of children one needed to first understand it, and the seventeenth century abounded with articles written on child psychology. Though seemingly harsh in their strictness, these schools, in their philosophy that childhood was a time of weakness, felt that discipline was necessary in developing in children the faculty of reasoning. ³² From these concepts has emerged with obvious changes the child-oriented society of today.

The insistence on humiliating childhood, to mark it out and improve it, diminished in the course of the eighteenth century. Arie's talks of this moving away from the brutal humiliation as a progressive awareness that was no longer associated with the weaknesses of childhood and no longer recognized the need for its humiliation but now was becoming a question of awakening in the child an adult sense of responsibility and dignity. This new concept would take root in the seventeenth century and triumph in the nineteenth century, becoming the basis for the liberalism of our education today.

Patriarchial Role/Emergence of Women

The Companionate Marriage

During the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries the authority of the father over the family was likened to the authority of the king in the State. Men up to and through the seventeenth century exercised almost absolute control over their households, at the direct expense of the women. ³³ A quote from Stone's book attributed to a Mary Astell in 1706 sums up this state of affairs, "If all men are born free, how is it that all women are born slaves?" ³⁴

Political theory of the seventeenth century finally began to evolve. The idea of marriage as a contractual obligation developed, providing for common interest and property. Because this was incompatible with the absolute domestic patriarchy of the past, influential politicians and religious leaders of this century attempted to undermine the traditional absolute authority of the father and the husband. ³⁵

Laws became progressively inclined, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to insist on far greater care for protection of the property rights of the wife regarding marriage settlements. However, these improvements were for a long time limited only to the wealthy women of society. The vast majority of women were only gradually affected by these changes. As a Mr. Blackstone, a writer of the late seventeenth century put it, "The husband and wife are one, and the husband is that one." As late as 1869, John Stuart Mill described the legal position of most women in England as one of total dependence on their husbands. ³⁶

Increasingly during the eighteenth century another evolution was taking place alongside that of political theory. This was the initiation of marriage based not so much on economic considerations but on affection. Prior to this time, marriages between the children of families had been arranged by the parents. Gradually, the shift of control of marital choice from parents to children would have important consequences upon marital relations. By the second half of the eighteenth century a clear trend to companionate marriages was emerging.

The hardest evidence for a decline in the near absolute authority of the husband over the wife was the decline in the husband's power to control his wife's estate and income. Prior to these changes in law the wife had little legal power over the family's money or even her own. By law the children belonged solely to the husband and even after death the widow had no rights over them. ³⁷

This evolution of the husband/wife roles required a sharing in authority and dominance between the sexes since it now depended on a greater awareness of equality. This re-assessment gave impetus to the earliest feminist movements and the considerable efforts in the quality and quantity of female education. Stone emphasizes that because of these changes away from a strict patriarchal influence, the institution of marriage came under severe stress and brought with it profound changes in domestic relationships. This brought cost as well as benefits.

Economic Influences Upon Family

The economic function of the poor family has changed radically over time. Up to the late seventeenth century the family was a unit of production, its members working mostly in or around the home, or in nearby fields. Today, it is a unit of consumption, productive labor being carried on individually for wage outside the home. ³⁸

Regardless of how much the source of income for poor families has changed, the results still seem much the same over time: poverty remains poverty with all its negative associations. Among the conditions which have blighted American life, surely the most puzzling has been the continuation of poverty. This paradox of poverty in the land of plenty continues to be one of the most disturbing problems facing the American consciousness.

For some, this paradox has served to reinforce a number of deeply rooted attitudes and prejudices concerning the poor. Accordingly, the philosophy of the upward mobility has never been possible for all people in America in spite of what we have been told. Equal opportunity has never really been a reality.

Yet, in spite of these very real and difficult to negotiate barriers people continually strive to obtain a piece of the American dream, to gain a financial foothold and succeed, whether it be for themselves or for their families in the future. Some do succeed, some succeed partially never really matching the reality of some success with their dreams of success, and some fail totally.

The dream of a better life, to get beyond the trappings of poverty and gain some measure of success, has always been a strong desire for most people. There is little dignity in poverty and in feeling unsuccessful, particularly in America. This seems to be a major theme in each of the plays we have chosen to study, families and the individuals in those families searching for some dignity.

History Activities for students

Students will construct a chart comparing family life in the medieval times to family life in modern times covering the following topics:

- a. affection
- b. marriage
- c. parental roles
- d. nature of childhood
- e. education

Introduction to Plays

As stated previously in our introduction we chose plays over novels and short stories for their readability and for their ease at following characterization. We chose three specific plays for several reasons. These plays portray families from three different ethnic backgrounds (Black, White, Hispanic). The families have some similar economic difficulties, lack of money, success, and ability to lock into the American dream. Yet, each family follows its own course in dealing with these difficulties.

A central question that might be asked concerning the families in each of these plays is 'What makes some families fall apart in the face of severe difficulties, while other families are able to pull together, and stay together?' Above all else, above color, class, and opportunity, these plays represent families struggling with universal and timeless issues that concern all families. Though these works and the families contained within them are creations of the writer's mind, they speak truths to us in our own lives, and certainly reveal insights

to us in remembering and thinking about our own families. We hope to help our students in perceiving some of these insights in our discussion of these plays.

Death of A Salesman

Death of A Salesman is the story about a white working class family. Willy Loman, a traveling salesman, is the head of the family. He has worked for thirty-four years. He thinks of himself as being very important to his company, traveling across New England and selling his goods.

The play begins with Willy returning home from what was to have been an extended trip to New England. He returns after only a few hours. He talks to his wife, Linda, about the deterioration of the things around him, his ability to keep his mind on his driving, and most importantly he talks about their son, Biff.

Biff has just recently returned from home after being away for fourteen years. Willy continually thinks about Biff, not as the man he has become, but as the Biff of high school days (playing football and courting scholarships). Biff hasn't really become a man; he never really found himself.

In high school, Biff was a very good football player, but he flunked math in his senior year. Biff journeys to Boston to explain to Willy his failure. But because of Willy's own failures and weaknesses Biff is unable to really talk to his father and Willy is unable to reach out to Biff. Biff and Willy never have true closeness nor can each trust the other after this incident. Both Biff's maturation and Willy's remembrance of past days are frozen in time.

Biff, after fourteen years of menial jobs, gets together with his brother Happy and tries to think up some better jobs for himself in New York. He thinks about asking a former employer for a loan of ten thousand dollars. Willy for a while dreams with them thinking that they really can make a go of it. He tries for another less demanding job himself within his company. Not only is Willy rebuffed by his employer, but is removed from his present position as a traveling salesman. Even though an old friend of Willy's offers him a job in New York, Willy refuses. His pride is crushed and yet it is his pride that will not allow him to accept this other position. Biff doesn't get his loan and makes an attempt to talk honestly with Willy about himself and his failures. Willy is unable to hear Biff, listening only to his own voices and believing in his own illusions. Biff makes one final attempt to reach out to Willy later on in the play but Willy is beyond reach. Willy is locked in his own private world, imagining things that can't be, unable to see the truth around him.

Finally, possibly seeing beyond the illusion that he has carried with him for years, Willy commits suicide. His death will give his family twenty thousand dollars. Willy, who throughout his life wants to be well liked and remembered, dies a forgotten individual because no one attends his funeral.

Affection, while not synonymous with responsibility, does strongly imply it, particularly in the context of the family.

Willy loves Happy and Biff but fails to give them a sense of responsibility. He gives them style over substance, image over reality. When Happy and Biff are children they are shielded from the consequences of the world, but as they grow older the flaws in their upbringing become more evident with increasingly negative results. Happy grows into a foolish, irresponsible adult, and Biff into a distant, cold, and unconnected individual. If it is true that no one is happier than the parents when their children succeed, then the opposite must be true—no one is sadder than the parents when their children fail. Willy sets his children up for failure because he is weak and transfers his weaknesses and illusions to his children. He senses their failures as adults but can't admit

them and he is truly a sad man because of it. If any lesson is to be learned, it may be that parents must love their children wisely, recognizing that children need discipline, moderation, and reality in order to grow into responsible adults.

Linda loves Willy in spite of all his failings and difficulties. She takes very much a secondary role to Willy and maintains a sad, yet loving affection for her sons. She acts as a mediator between the sons and their father but really keeps a low profile throughout their interactions. She defends Willy to her sons as she senses the great rift between them. She is the faithful wife and loving mother. In spite of her attempts to speak about the issues that are destroying her family, she is unable to bring about a lasting reunion. Her character is hopeful in spirit but too passive by nature, and she like her sons and Willy can only hold onto dreams that will never come true.

Willy and his family are to an extent like many families who live on the fringes of the economic mainstream: hard working and proud, yet unable to quite succeed to a level where financial pressures cease to become an obsession for living. Willy is an extremely proud man, who invests part of himself in everything he buys. His house, his car, even his refrigerator become symbols of accomplishment. When these fail, Willy takes it very personally.

The house Willy and Linda own is a place of good memories and comfort, a refuge from the intensity of the outside world. When Willy laments the construction of larger buildings erected on the sides of his little house, he is speaking for everyone who has had to cope with the push of an often times impersonal modern expansion intruding into a community.

When Willy loses his position as a salesman, he loses not only his source of income but his connection to what made him tick as a person. This isn't just a job that Willy works from eight till five; it is Willy; it is his life. When he loses this and all the illusions he had built around it, he essentially loses much of what is important to him in life. He has every right to expect better treatment from his company. It isn't unreasonable to expect to be treated with dignity when you have invested a large piece of your life in a job. Yet, we know all too well the stories that appear with regularity concerning factory closings and layoffs. Individuals and their families dependent upon such unskilled jobs for their livelihood would seem the most vulnerable to this situation. Willy's personality flaws predisposed him and his children to a life of frustration and struggle. Society in its often callous and unforgiving way (particularly life in the American business world) also shares responsibility in dooming Willy and ultimately his family to their tragic end.

Questions we will discuss with our students concerning *Death of A Salesman* are:

1. What are the problems faced by Willy and his family and all families when the head of the house loses his/her job?
2. What are the problems faced by Biff and his family and all families when adult sons/daughters can neither find a good job nor hold a job?
- 3 How do Willy and Linda raise their children? What are the issues parents must face in promoting a sense of responsibility in their children?
4. What is affection and how is it expressed in the Loman family?
5. How are families affected by a death in the family?
6. What are the responsibilities of a father to his son, and a son to his father? What are the problems in the relationship between Willy and Biff?

The Oxcart

The Oxcart is a play about a Puerto Rican family which moves from the mountainous region of Puerto Rico to the city of San Juan and finally to New York City. The family consists of the mother (Dn. Gabriella), eldest son (Luis), teenage daughter (Juanita), youngest son (Chaquito), and the grandfather (Don Chago).

The play indicates that the family once owned a large farm but because of hurricanes, and later the taking over of the land by the government and corporations, they now live on three acres of land in a small dwelling. Since the father had passed away, their economic situation became worse and they cannot afford the mortgage on the land.

Luis, the eldest, decides they would move to San Juan where he could work in a factory and where Chaquito can get a better education. The new home in San Juan is a disappointment to the whole family. They are now living in a shack where there is no land for planting crops. Chaquito resorts to stealing, and Juanita's attitudes toward life and family change because of unfortunate experiences and influence of undesirable friends. Dn. Gabriella is very unhappy by the change in the family. Luis feels responsible for all the unhappiness and suggests that a move to America will solve all their problems because America is the land of opportunity. He believes that their only hope is to begin a new life.

They are now living in a low income apartment building in the Bronx. Luis works long hours in a factory to maintain the needs of the family. Juanita, although working, resorts to prostitution to make extra money and doesn't live at home. Chaquito remains in San Juan after being arrested for theft.

The play ends tragically with Luis's death as a result of an accident in the factory. Because of his death, Juanita finds an inner strength and decides to return to the "land" (Puerto Rico's mountainous region) with Dn. Gabriella and begin a better life for Chaquito.

We find that in spite of the difficulties the family encounters the family is the main source of emotional support. This is expressed by Luis's intense love for his mother and the constant desire to make life easier for her. Luis loves her even more than if he had been her own son, because he was grateful for her raising him as her own son.

The grandfather, Dn. Chago symbolizes the strength of traditional values. Although he loves the members of the family and wants very much to be with them, he cannot leave the land which is part of his existence.

In this culture, it is evident that the male portrayed by Luis is the dominant figure. Although Dn. Gabriella influences her children and they respect her, she never tries to change a situation once Luis decides on it. He makes all final decisions and the family members adhere to his authority.

Dn. Gabriella, because she loves Luis so much, never lets on that she is unhappy but reminds him constantly that he is doing the best he can for the family. She is caught between a culture where women cook, attend domestic chores and give support to their family and a culture where women are free to voice their opinions and also have the right to engage in social activities.

The children are viewed as a hope for a better future. The mother has hopes of Chaquito becoming educated. However, the only important factor considered for Juanita is that she find a good husband. The young lady portrayed in this play is to remain a virgin until marriage; if this is not the case, it is a disgrace to the family as a whole.

Dn. Gabriella, unhappy with the many changes the family has encountered, loses her zest for life and just exists. It isn't until she receives a letter from Puerto Rico where her brother is encouraging her to return and work the land, that her spirit is somewhat lifted.

Questions we will discuss with our students concerning *The Oxcart* are:

1. How does the love of the land affect the family? How does each move affect their lives?
2. What does it mean to be the head of the family? What role does Dn. Gabriella play? How do you feel about her raising a child as her own since he was the son of her husband's mistress?
3. Would we view the character of Luis any different if the hints that he was not Dn. Gabriella's son were not there?
4. What pulled this family together? What pulled them apart?
5. Can you give some reasons why Juanita resorted to prostitution? Can you sympathize with her actions?
6. How does progress affect the family? How does history affect the family?

7. What evidence can we find that shows the affection between the family members?

Comparative questions between Death of A Salesman and The Oxcart :

1. How do the families in *The Oxcart* and *Death of A Salesman* compare regarding raising their children and teaching them a sense of responsibility?
2. What is the importance of work to the Loman Family and the family in *The Oxcart* ; how did it affect their lives?

A Raisin In The Sun

A Raisin In The Sun , the story of the Younger family, is about the affirmation of the human spirit. The play details the efforts of the Youngers, a poor black family struggling to overcome the barriers of poverty, prejudice, and adult irresponsibility on their journey toward the fulfillment of a dream. Their dream is to move out of their small, rundown apartment and into a house with a yard. Though the dream of buying a house is not shared initially by all the members of the family, it eventually becomes the focal point for pulling the family together.

The Younger family consists of Ruth, Travis, Beneatha, Walter Lee, and Lena (Mama). Each contributes a certain viewpoint and strength that helps this family succeed, but it really is Walter Lee's and Lena's story.

Lena Younger, the mother of the family receives ten thousand dollars from her late husband's insurance. With this money she plans to put a down payment on a small house so her family can have a real home and help her youngest daughter, Beneatha, so she can attend medical school. Walter Lee, her son, has other ideas for the money; he plans to invest in a liquor store. Although, Mama refuses at first to give him the money, she relents and entrusts him with \$6500.00, of which \$3500.00 is to go into an account for Beneatha's education and \$3000.00 is to do with as he chooses. She has wisely used the remaining \$3500.00 as a down payment on her house. Although the house is in an all-white neighborhood where the residents have made it plain that the Youngers are not welcome. Walter uses the money his mother gave him neither wisely nor honestly. He invests all \$6500.00 in his liquor store, only to learn that the man who was to be his partner disappears with the money. Walter is crushed and the other family members are in shock. Only Mama is able to see beyond the hurt of the moment. She summons her inner strength and love to forgive Walter and admonishes her family for not doing the same.

As the family tries to make some sense of their dilemma, the movers arrive to carry their belongings to their new house. At the same time a representative from the white neighborhood has come to the Youngers' apartment to buy out their investment in their new house. Walter has called him. Mama, in one final attempt at saving Walter Lee, lays the future of her family in his hands. She lets him make the final decision to sell or move into the house. Her faith is not misplaced, because Walter Lee tells the man that his family is moving after all.

This is a family filled with emotion—emotions often explosive and frustrated, yet also filled with gentleness and a true sense of love and commitment. Mama and Walter's affection for young Travis is genuinely touching. Mama and Walter's affection for each other throughout the play carry the true weight of a love burdened with a mother's hope for her son to find himself, and of a son trying desperately to gain his dignity as a man. All the family members including Walter's wife, Ruth, his sister, Bennie, and young Travis give voice to a deep sense of family commitment and purpose. In spite of differences with the family, *their* family is the ultimate setting for their expressions of love, nurturance and support.

Walter desperately wants to head his family. He thinks it is his duty as the man of the household to be the source of leadership and strength. Yet he feels himself a failure. Without monetary means he senses he is powerless. When his dreams of a quick investment backfires, it furthers reinforces his sense of frustration. That he ultimately finds his leadership role is a tribute to his inner strength, as well as to the strong influence of his mother. Mama is in fact the true strength and leader of this family, yet her gentleness and wisdom allow ample room for the growth of Walter as the head of the family.

Ten year old Travis is the joy of Mama's life. Her grandson is one to be protected, nurtured, and forgiven. She truly loves him and revels in his innocence and youth.

Walter also loves Travis deeply. His love is as genuine as Mama's and one can sense his feeling for his son and his hopes for his future. He is very giving to Travis and very physically affectionate. Throughout the entire play, we get a sense that in spite of having very little in the way of material wealth, Travis is indeed the most precious possession any family could have.

That Ruth considers an abortion of her unborn baby is not to be seen as a rejection of life, but, rather an affirmation of it. She doesn't want to bring a child into a world of poverty without hope. She decides not to have the abortion because she senses that there is a ray of hope and that possibly children themselves are this hope.

Both the economic and social pressures on this family are immense. They have little money, and what money they do have almost tears the family apart. In fact the crisis they are to have concerning the money ultimately pulls their family together after much reflection and discussion. Money, ultimately is not very important.

Prejudice provides another obstacle, one which could have dissolved this family unit had they buckled under to its narrow thinking. The family and particularly Walter take the challenge and decide to confront it with dignity and some backbone.

A family of real inner strength and character!

Questions we will ask our students concerning *A Raisin In The Sun* and overall family issues:

1. What are Walter Lee's feelings and what are the concerns he faces in trying to become the head of his family?
How does Walter finally become a man?
2. What is the importance of Mama's role in this family?
What does she bring to her family from her position of age and experience?
3. How does the Younger family deal with the issues of poverty?
4. How does the Younger family deal with the issues of prejudice?
5. What is the importance of having a job, particularly a good job to the members of the Younger family? What is the importance of an education?
6. How are the issues of being an adult and responsibility connected for Walter Lee and all the Youngers?
7. How is affection displayed in the Younger family?

Comparative Questions between the three plays:

1. How are the issues of being the head of the family portrayed in the three plays?
2. How does poverty affect these three families?
3. How do individuals in each of the three families differ in their attempt to obtain respectability?
4. What is the role of the mother in each of the three plays?
5. What importance does owning a house or a piece of land have in each of the plays?
6. What are the contributing factors in each of these three families that either pull them apart or bring them closer together?
7. To what extent are these three families victims of an indifferent society and how does each

resolve this conflict?

Final Section: Creative Writing

The third and final part of our unit will concentrate on our students and *their* families. We would like to guide our students through the process of creative writing (short stories, simple autobiographies and poems). This will serve to increase our students' understanding of the theme of family while at the same time develop their writing skills.

Students will be using words, phrases, and paragraphs to express their own original thought. In order to obtain this goal, we will show them the job of sorting, deciding and choosing the right word for the right spot. In order to reduce frustration, the teacher will not be concerned at this time with spelling or grammatical errors. In this area, we will not attempt to teach spelling or grammar, but approach it in the editing.

As teachers, we can provide conditions for creative writing by helping the children put their experiences into spoken words in a descriptive way.

Since the topic is their own family, the children will be motivated because the writing will grow out of their own experiences. The teacher will play the role as a guide, helper, encourager and supporter rather than a leader.

If students experience difficulty beginning the assignment, the teacher may listen to their reasons for not writing and then discover if they can't find the right words, if they need help with a topic sentence, or an outline to follow. The teacher may provide a short autobiography of her/his own family thus providing the students with an example of how an autobiography is written. The teacher may keep a poetry file on families in general to help the Students who are having difficulty in this area. For the short story, the teacher can provide a main-idea sentence on the blackboard, encouraging students to expand from it. The children will gain a better sense of how to write a short story.

Notes

1. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex And Marriage In England 1500-1800* , (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), p. 21.

2. Ibid, p. 81.
3. Ibid.
4. Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* , (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 59.
5. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex And Marriage In England 1500-1800* , (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), p. 81.
6. Ibid, p. 82.
7. Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life In Reformation Europe*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 59.
8. Ibid, p. 101.
9. Ibid, pp. 101, 112.
10. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex And Marriage In England 1500-1800* , (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), pp. 83-84.
11. Ibid, p. 84.
12. Ibid, p. 264.
13. Ibid, p. 256.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid, pp. 257-260, 269-270.
16. Philippe Ariés, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* , (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 26.
17. Ibid, p. 28.
18. Ibid, p. 28-29.
19. Ibid, p. 33.
20. Ibid, pp. 43-46.
21. Ibid, pp. 46-47.
22. Ibid, p. 50.
23. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex And Marriage In England 1500-1800*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), pp. 258-259.
24. Philippe Ariés, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* , (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 151-154.
25. Ibid, p. 154.
26. Lawrence Stone, *The Family Sex And Marriage In England 1500-1800* , (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), pp. 116-118.
27. Philippe Ariés, *Centuries Of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* , (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 127.
28. Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation England 1500-1800* , (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), p. 133.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid, p. 373.
32. Ibid, p. 132.
33. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex And Marriage In England 1500-1800*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), p. 164.
34. Ibid, p. 163.
35. Ibid, p. 165.
36. Ibid, p. 222.
37. Ibid.

38. Lawrence Stone, "Family History in the 1980's: Past Achievements and Future Trends." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 12 (1981), p. 64.

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