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English 1302, CRN# 77123

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*Reading Between The Lines*



Critics have said that Ernest Hemingway is a matter of dialogue. He uses short sentences and simple vocabulary honed from his time as a reporter to create universal stories for his readers. He illustrates his mastery in his very short story “Hills Like White Elephants” first published in August 1927 in his second collection of short stories, entitled Men Without Women. His story is essentially that of two lovers’ heated discussion of an abortion. Although Hemingway never says the word abortion, it is implied through clear reading in between the lines. Therefore, without use of physical characteristics, he paints a vivid description of the couple and their very personal dilemma. He does this through dialogue only. **His use of dialogue gives a clear characterization of the female and male characters.**

Of the two lovers in “Hills Like White Elephants,” Jig, the female companion, is the only character given a name. Hemingway has named her after a popular 1920’s dance. As her name denotes, she and her male companion have been doing “a jig” together in regards to their carefree relationship, but sadly “the jig is up.”

**Commented [n1]:** MLA Heading  
MLA Double Spacing

**Commented [n2]:** MLA Centered Title  
The title captures the reader’s attention.  
A photo is illustrated under it to give a further idea of what is to come in essay response.

**Commented [n3]:** Assignment Question - Sample  
How does Ernest Hemingway’s *Hills Like White Elephants* use dialogue to characterize the two characters in his story? Explain in an essay response.

Referring to something you have read.

**Commented [n4]:** Refer to author and name of the text.

**Commented [n5]:** Include a summary.

**Commented [n6]:** Thesis statement answers the assignment question. How does Ernest Hemingway use dialogue only to describe the two characters in his very short story?

Also, of important significance is Hemingway's reference to Jig as "the girl" in dialogue conversations. He refers to her as "the girl" seventeen times throughout the short story. Surely, this overemphasis of this phrase means a great deal. Since she is said to be "a girl," she thinks and acts like "a girl" not a woman in an adult relationship discussing a very adult topic, abortion.

Furthermore, Jig is a multifaceted character but in a bad way. She is childlike and naive, and she only hopes that "it (her relationship) will be nice again" (475). She is very eager to please the man, and she puts herself last. "And if I do it, you'll be happy and things will be like they were and you'll love me. If I say things are like white elephants, you'll like it" (477). She further expresses herself and illustrates her low self-worth when she continues, "Then I'll do it. Because I don't care about me" (477). This line shows her great desire to keep her companion happy regardless of her own well-being. **Ironically, her companion is not concerned with her well-being even though he continuously reassures her that he is.**

He is stereotypically, "a man and the American." He is in total control of their relationship. He is selfish and manipulative. He reassures Jig in only self-serving ways that will work in his favor. He wants her to think and act according to his terms. When she needs reassurance and or an option to the abortion, he half-heartedly tells her, "that I don't want you to do it if you don't want to. I'm perfectly willing to go through with it if it means anything to you" (478). By dancing around the question, the American waives responsibility, yet he encourages Jig to have the abortion by using the words "perfectly willing" in his reply. When questioned further and asked if "it means anything to him"

**Commented [n7]:** Using small story details to explain a character – Jig.

**Commented [n8]:** Topic sentence

**Commented [n9]:** Support for Jig's characterization:

- 1.Childlike
- 2.Naive
- 3.Easily Led
- 4.Low Self-Esteem

**Commented [n10]:** Only page number cited because only one source is used throughout the essay response.

**Commented [n11]:** Use quotes to support thesis statement.

**Commented [n12]:** Transitional sentence.

**Commented [n13]:** Topic Sentence

- Man – American
- 1.Controlling
  - 2.Selfish
  - 3.Manipulative

**Commented [n14]:** Use quotes to support thesis statement.

(478). He replies coyly, “Of course it does. But I don’t want anybody but you. I don’t want anyone else” (478). His words ring out his true selfish nature.

Along with being selfish and manipulative, the man is totally ignorant. On a constant basis in the story, he refers to the operation as “perfectly simple and perfectly natural.” He does not know what he is talking about. Furthermore, he uses statements like, “It’s not really anything, It’s just to let the air in” (477). An abortion, though practiced legally, professionally, and quickly in the United States today, is a serious matter; it has never been “just to let the air in” (478) not even in 1927.

In closing, this very short story by Ernest Hemingway is a clever one; it allows its 1927 audience to read about a controversial topic, abortion, which was taboo during these times even in Europe. The author does not provide detailed physical description of the characters, but the issue is completely detailed through the dialogue. Hemingway knew physical description was not needed because the couple could have been any couple anywhere in the world. Brilliant!

**Commented [n15]:** Topic sentence  
Ignorant  
1. Knowledge of Abortion

**Commented [n16]:** Use quotes to support thesis statement.

**Commented [n17]:** Conclusion – praise for Hemingway.

### Work Cited

Hemingway, Ernest. "Hills Like White Elephants." The Story and Its Writer: An Introduction to Fiction. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003. 475-478.

**Commented [n18]:** MLA Citation of a Short Story in a book

1. Author's name.
2. Title of Work
3. Name of Book
4. City of Publication
5. Publisher
6. Year of Publication
7. Page numbers of Work in Book