

# PLAINSWOMAN

## SEAO Introduction

# MLA CITATION

Forrest, Williams. "Plainswoman". *The Language of Literature*. Ed. Applebee, Arthur, et al. Evanston, Il.: McDougal Littell, 2002. 8-19. Print.

# Importance of Title

- \* Plainswoman = a woman who lives on, or is OF, the Great Plains of the USA in the pioneer days.
- \* Plainswoman= a plain, ordinary woman, an average woman of the time. The story could be about the fears/needs of ANY woman living on the Plains in this time period.

# Point of View

- \* We know the narration is 3rd person limited because we only see what Nora sees and only know her thoughts and feelings.
- \* Reliable because the narrator doesn't try to sway our opinions. We are told the story in a straightforward manner.

# Setting

- \* Where: the Great Plains of the United States
- \* When: the pioneer era, probably 1840-1850. We know it's before cars (or they'd be mentioned), and before the Civil War (states formed before this war) . It's Autumn.
- \* Duration: the action of the story takes place in only a few minutes (30 min max). From the action to the aftermath may be as little as a few hours or as much as a few days before Rolf comes back. *The flashback is not part of the action of this story.*

# Characters

- \* Protagonist: Nora, dynamic, round. She's a lady from New England who married a ranch owner, Rolf. She is unhappy on the Plains. She is pregnant.
- \* Antagonist: Nature/the Plains, static, flat. The environment is vast, harsh, cold, stark, and foreboding. It represents what Nora sees the environment & people's rough ways as "uncaring". It's so different from the East Nora is familiar with.

\* Supporting Characters:

- \* Pleny, the old ranch hand with the infected finger. He (and his finger) motivate Nora's transformation. Rolf is Nora's husband. He's the reason she's on the Plains. We only see him in the flashback.
- \* Minor Characters: pregnant woman on the train, woman with the gun, the young cowboy.

# Conflict

- \* Main Conflict: “old”, soft, Eastern lady Nora vs. the need to become a strong woman of the plains. Options are retreat to the East, or destructions (physical or mental death). “Adapt or die”. Pleny’s gangrene is symptomatic of this conflict
- \* Internal Conflict: Nora’s fears/lady-like ways vs. the harsh reality of life on the Great Plains.

- \* External Conflict: Nora's fear and revulsion for what must be done vs. the need to cut off Pleny's diseased finger to prevent his ultimate death.
- \* Distance, lack of medical care, her pregnancy, isolation

# Plot

- \* Exposition: Nora is a lady from New England who has married Rolf, a cattle rancher from the Great Plains. She and a ranch hand, Pleny are alone at the ranch while the men drive the cattle to market. It is Fall. Nora is pregnant and afraid. She is fixing breakfast.

\* Rising Action: Pleny comes in, holding his injured finger which he has kept hidden from her for several days. He explains the infection has turned to gangrene and he asks her to cut it off. Nora runs to her room, hiding from the responsibility. (She reviews her journey to this moment in a flash back). Pleny follows, knocks on her door to beg for her help. Nora finds the inner strength to do what must be done and opens the door. She and Pleny go outside to the chopping block.

- \* Climax: The **MOMENT** the ax falls and she cuts off Pleny's finger.
- \* Falling Action: The epilogue scene where Nora is kneading bread and feels the baby kick for the first time. She laughs, showing she has overcome her fears and become a Plainswoman.

# Theme

- \* Subject/Topic: Facing fear (of change)
- \* Theme: Adapt or die (give up, end of dreams). The world will not change to suit you. You must adapt.
- \* Evidence: Nora is only happy after she changes
- \* Symbols:
  - \* baby's kick = new life (for Nora & her baby)

- \* Pleny's finger = her fears and the change she must make if life is to continue.
- \* The Plains= isolation, the unknown
- \* New England= comfort, home, safety, peace, civilization, the familiar, the known
- \* Cattle= life, survival, prosperity