

American Literature & Culture
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Mod 05 Lecture Number 31
Lillian Hellman The Children's Hour (Lecture 25)

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(Professor – student conversation starts)

Professor: So yeah, *The Children's Hour* by Lillian Hellman and we will begin reading the text today and just pay the attention to the fact that the way the play follows the concept, the construct of the unities of time, place and action, Ok and you know that the unity of time is important because the entire action should take, according to Aristotle, within the single revolution of the sun, mean the sun in Aristotelian times. That was the time when the sun used to revolve the earth, a single revolution that is within 24 hours.

This is more or less the time and what is the place, what is the place, the place is the Wright Dobie School for Girls. So at the onset we are told the scene is set in a room in the Wright Dobie School for Girls. So this is the all girls' boarding school. Kind of a school that caters very upper kind, very rich kind of girls and what is the action, extremely important, and unity of action yes, you have to pay attention to the way the play is very faithful to observing this unity, unity of action. And what is the play about, does anyone have any idea? *The Children's Hour*, what could it suggest?

Student: It is based on a false accusation of, well partly false accusation of lesbianism.

Professor: False, yeah so it's about a mischievous girl who accuses her teachers, two female teachers of having a lesbian relationship, quite a revolutionary play during the 30s. That is the time, the period of the play and how lives can be destroyed with one single lie, if it is told loud enough and if it is backed by people important enough. So this is a rich little teenager who is making these kinds of allegations but soon the entire community starts believing and that's taken of as a truth.

If you want to relate this particular theme with whatever we have been doing so far, think *Daisy Miller*. Think *Daisy Miller* and how her reputation is absolutely destroyed by the local gossip. What gossips and rumors and lying can do to people and their careers. And it is also important to, because Lillian Hellman was an activist as well as apart from being a great playwright, and she was politically quite active and you know what was happening during the late 30s and the 40s.

We were, America was in the throes of communist hunting, or rather the witch hunting period and they would look out or look around for people with so-called communist tendencies. So anyone who had remotely communistic tendencies, they would be branded as what? Anti American and they would be hunted down, careers would be destroyed, people committed suicide because of false allegations, allegations that were partly true sometimes but mostly sometimes because someone wants to ruin someone. And because of whatever rivalry or professional jealousy and they would spread a lie that this person has been harboring Anti American feelings, so that is so, this also can be read as a allegory to the then contemporary America, political climate in America during those times.

Ok, another important play you can always relate this play with Arthur Miller's *Crucible* which is also about, ostensibly about the Salem witch trials, again bunch of women were accused of practicing witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts in the seventeenth century. However Arthur Miller's play can be read as a commentary on America during the 50s when Senator McCarthy and his communist hunting forces were at their peak.

This is the back drop against which we are going to read the play. And of course the fact that it also addresses, then taboo theme of lesbianism. Ok so far, and it is interesting to note that the word lesbianism is never once mentioned in the play. So we are talking of those times.

You have read *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Ok and you know what's Brick's problem, Ok. But that is never once mentioned.

Ok, so homosexuality, at least the homoerotic feelings that exist between Brick and his dead friend, yeah but that's never, that is always there, that is the subtext however the word homosexuality or bisexuality is never ever uttered because of, obviously because of censorship in media and theater. And if you have watched the movie, you will find that homosexuality is completely pushed under the carpet in the film starring Paul Newman and Elizabeth Taylor. It is all about a marriage that has gone wrong. So yeah, so I will give you the stage directions.

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A room in the Wright Dobie School for Girls converted farmhouse 18 miles from the town of Lancel. It is a comfortable, unpretentious room used as after-study room and all other times as the living room. A large door left center faces the audience. There is a single door right against both back walls, book cases, a large desk is at right, a table, two sofas and 8 or 10 chairs. It is early in an afternoon in April. At rise Mrs. Lily Mortar is sitting in a large chair right center with her head back and her eyes closed.

She is a plump florid woman of 45 with obviously touched up hair; her clothes are too fancy for a classroom. Seven girls from 12 to 14 years old are informally grouped on chairs and sofa. 6 of them are sewing with no great amount of industry on pieces of white material. One

of the others, Evelyn Munn is using her scissors to trim the hair of Rosalie, who sits nervously in front of her.

She has Rosalie's head bent back at an awkward angle and is enjoying herself. The eighth girl Peggy Rogers is sitting in a higher chair than the others. She is reading aloud from a book. She is bored and she reads in a singsong tired voice.

Student: It is twice blest. It blesseth him that gives and him that takes 'tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes the throned monarch better than his crown, his sceptre shows the force of temporal power, the attribute to awe and majesty where in

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Professor: Mrs. Mortar suddenly opens her eyes and stares at haircutting.

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Professor: The children make efforts to warn Evelyn. Peggy raises her voice until she is shouting.

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Student: doth sit the dread and fear of kings but mercy is above

Student: Evelyn, what are you doing?

Student: nothing Mrs. Mortar

Student: You are certainly doing something. You are ruining the scissors for one thing.

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Student: But mercy is above. It

Student: Just the moment, Peggy.

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It is very unfortunate that you girls cannot sit quietly with your sewing and drink in the immortal words of the immortal band. Evelyn, go back to your sewing.

Student: I can't get the hem thraight.

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Student: Honey

Professor: Honeth

Student: I have been trying for three weekth, but jutht can't do it.

Student: Helen, please help Evelyn with the hem.

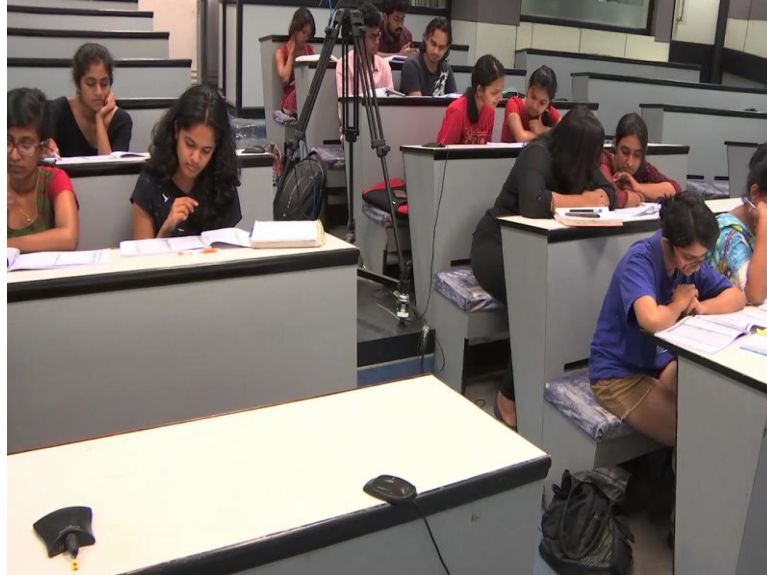
Professor: Evelyn rises, holding up the garment Evelyn has been working on. It is soiled and shapeless and so much has been cut off that it is now hardly large enough for a child of 5.

(Giggling)

Student: She can't even wear that Mrs. Mortar.

Student: Well try to do something about it.

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Student: Make some handkerchiefs or something. Be clever about it. Women must learn these tricks.

Student: Peggy, continue

Student: Mightiest in the mightiest

Student: 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes the throned monarch better than his crown, his sceptre, his sceptre shows the force of temporal power, the attribute to awe and majesty wherein

Student: Ferebam, ferebas, ferebat, ferebamus, ferebatis, fere, fere

Professor: Catherine

Student: Ferebant

Student: Ferebamus, ferebatis, ferebant

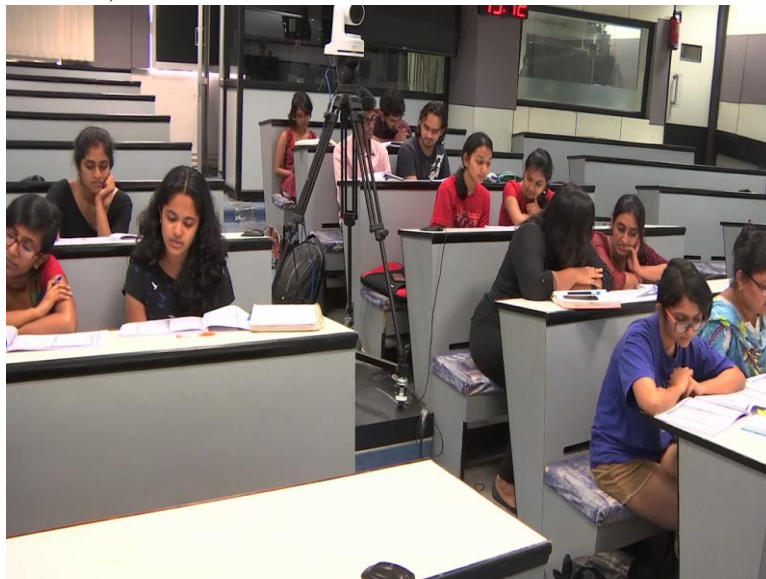
Student: Who is doing that?

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Student: Where in doth sit the dread and fear of kings; but mercy is above this sceptred sway, it is enthroned in the heart in the hearts of kings, it is an attribute to God himself

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Student: Peggy, can't you imagine yourself as Pontia? Can't you read the lines with some care, some feeling, some pity? Ah as Sir Henry said to me many's the time, pity makes the actress. Now why can't you feel pity?

Student: I guess I feel pity

Student: Ferrebamus, ferebatis, fere, fere

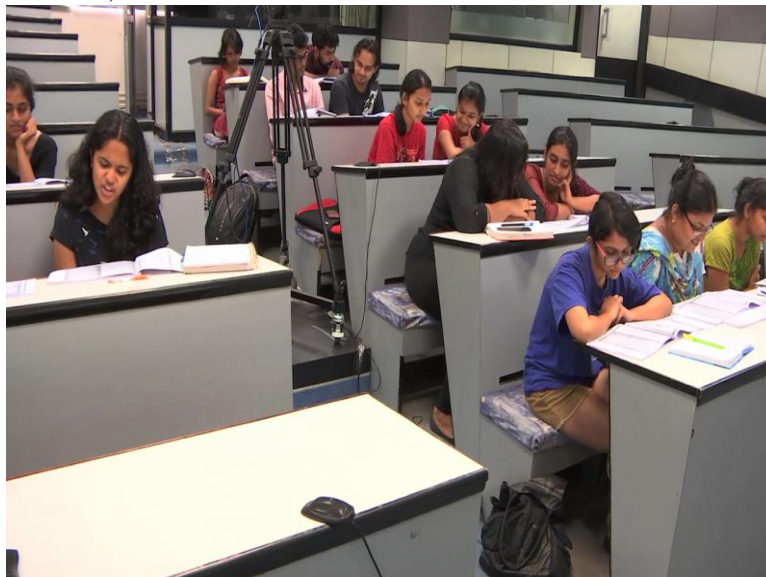
Student: Ferebant, stupid

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Student: How many people in this room are talking? Peggy read the line again. I will give you the cue.

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Student: What's a cue?

Student: A cue is a line or word given the actor or actress to remind them of their next speech.

Student: To remind him or her.

Student: Weren't you ever at the movies, Mrs. Mortar?

Student: I had many offers, my dear. But cinema is a shallow art. It has no, no, no fourth dimension. Now Peggy, if you only try to submerge yourself in this problem, you are pleading for the life of a man.

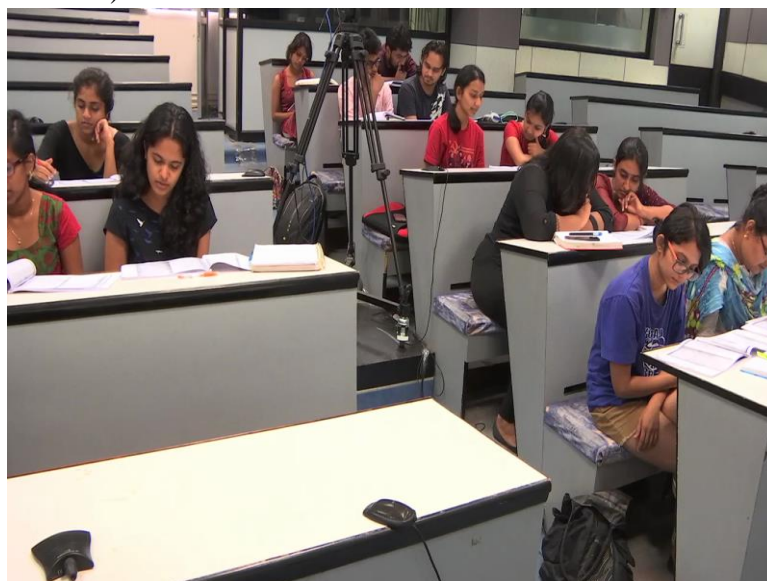
Professor: She rises and

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Professor: there are faint sighs from the girls who stare at her with blank, bored faces. She recites with gestures.

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Student: But mercy is above is sceptred sway, it is enthroned in the hearts of kings, it is an attribute to God Himself; and earthly power doth then show liketh God's when mercy seasons justice

Student: Utor, fruor, fungor, potior, and vescor take the dative.

Student: Take the ablative

Student: Oh dear

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Student: Utor, fruor, fung

Student: You have something to tell the class?

Student: We have got a Latin exam this afternoon

Student: And you intend to occupy the sewing and elocution hour what you would be learning yesterday?

Student: Takes a more than yesterday to learn it.

Student: Well, I cannot allow you to interrupt us like this.

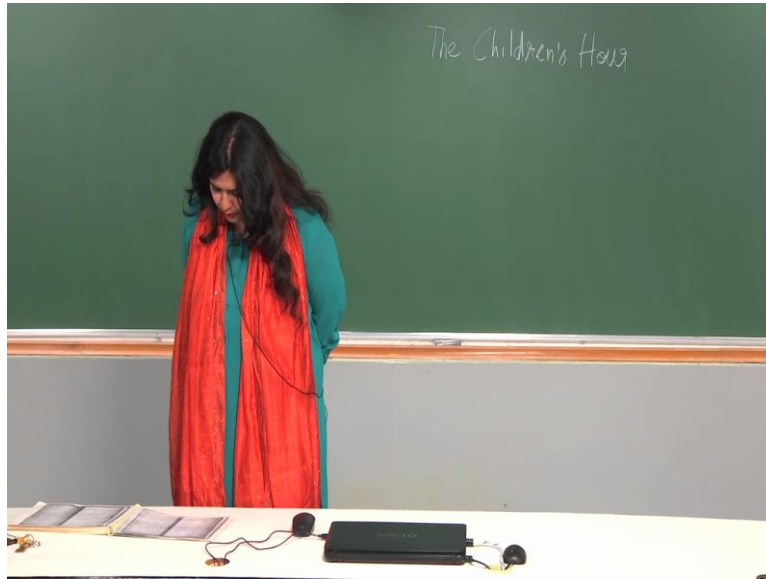
Student: But we are finished sewing.

Student: I bet you are good at Latin, Mrs. Mortar?

Student: Long ago, dear, long ago. Now take your book over by the window and don't disturb our enjoyment of Shakespeare.

Professor: Catherine and Louis rise

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Professor: go to window, stand mumbling and gesturing.

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Student: Let us go back again. It is an attribute to

Professor: At this point the door opens

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Professor: far enough to let Mary Tilford clutching a slightly faded bunch of wild flowers squeeze cautiously in. She is 14, neither pretty nor ugly. She is an undistinguished looking girl except for the sullenly dissatisfied expression on her face.

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Student: and earthly power doth then show liketh God's when mercy seasons justice, we do pray for mercy and that same prayer doth teach

Student: You skipped 3 lines.

Student: In my entire career I never missed a line.

Student: But you did skip 3 lines, see.

Professor: Mrs. Mortar seeing

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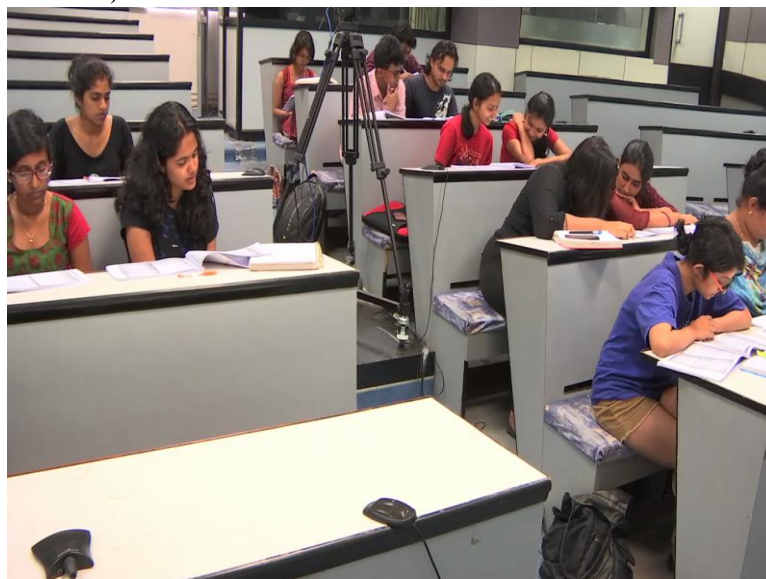


Professor: Mary's sidling along wall towards other end of the room; turns to her to avoid Peggy and the book.

Student: Mary, you are going to catch it now.

Student: Mary

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Student: Yes, Mrs. Mortar?

Student: This is a pretty time to be coming here sewing class, I must say. Even if you have no interest in your work, you must remember that you obey a little courtesy. Courtesy is breeding. Breeding is an excellent thing. Always remember that.

Student: Please Mrs. Mortar can I write that down?

Student: Certainly, suppose you all write it down.

Student: But we wrote it down last week.

Student: Mary I am still awaiting your explanation. Where have you been?

Student: I took a walk.

Student: So you took a walk. And may I ask young lady; are we in the habit of taking walks when we should be in our classes?

Student: I am sorry, Mrs. Mortar. I want to get you these flowers. I thought you would like them. And I didn't know it would take so long to pick them.

Student: Well, well.

Student: You were telling last week how much you liked flowers. And I thought I would bring you some and

Student: It was very sweet of you, Mary. I always like thoughtfulness. But you must not allow anything to interfere with your classes. Now run along dear, and get a vase and some water to put my flowers in.

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Professor: Mary turns, stick out her tongue at Helen, says Ah and exits left.

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Student: You may put that book away, Peggy. I am sure your family need never worry about you going on stage.

Student: I don't want to go on stage. I want to be light house keeper's wife.

Student: I certainly hope you won't read to him

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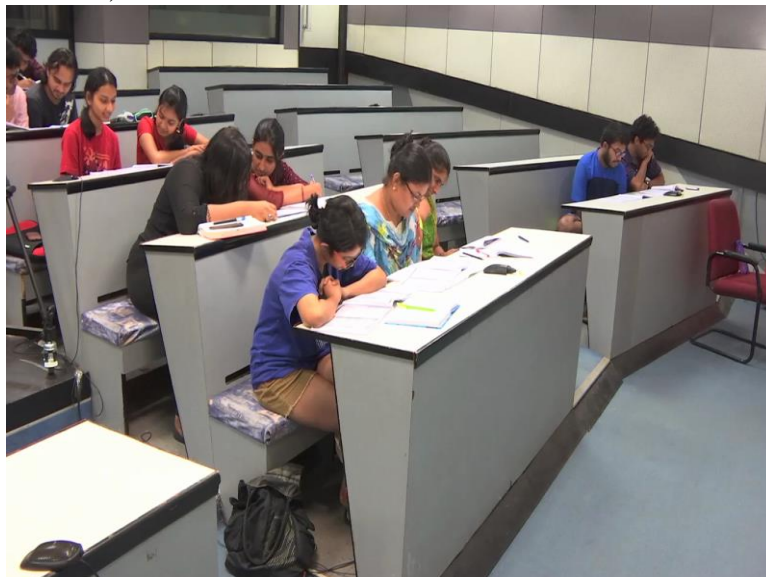
Professor: The laughter of the class pleases her. Peggy sits among the other girls who are making a great show of doing nothing. Mrs. Mortar returns to her chair, puts her head back, closes her eyes.

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Student: How much longer, Cataline, are you going to abuse our patience? Now translate it and for goodness sake, try to get it right this time.

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Student: One master passion in the breast like Aaron's serpent swallows all the rest.

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Professor: She and Lois are murmuring Karen Wright's entrance. Karen is an attractive woman of 28, casually pleasant in manner without sacrifice of warmth or dignity. She smiles at the girls, goes to the desk. With her entrance, there is an immediate change in the manner of girls. They are fond of her and they respect her. She gives Mortar, whose quotation has reached her, an annoyed look.

Student: Quo usque tanedm abutere

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Student: Abutere, what's happened to your hair Rosalie?

Student: It got cut, Miss Wright.

Student: I can see that, a new style? Looks as though it has holes in it

Student: I didn't mean to do it that bad, Miss Wright. Rothalie'th got funny hair. I thaw a picture in the paper and I was trying to do it that way.

Student: Oh, what shall I do, Miss Wright? Its long here and its short here and

Student: Never mind. Come up to my room later and I will see if I can fix it for you.

Student: And hereafter we have no haircutting.

Student: Helen, have you found your bracelet?

Student: No, I haven't and I have looked everywhere.

Student: Have another look; it must be in your room somewhere.

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Professor: Mary comes in right, with her flowers in a vase. When she sees Karen, she loses some of her assurance. Karen looks at the flowers in surprise.

Student: Good afternoon, Miss. Wright.

Professor: She sits down, looks at Karen who is staring hard at the flowers.

Student: Hello, Mary

Student: Peggy has been reading Poria for us.

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Student: Peggy doesn't like Portia?

Student: I don't think she quite appreciates it but

Student: Well, I didn't either. I don't think I do yet. Where do you get your flowers Mary?

Student: She picked them for me. It made her a little late to class but she heard me say I loved flowers and she we went to get them for me, first wild flowers of the season.

Student: But not the very first. Are they, Mary?

Student: I don't know.

Student: Where did you get them?

Student: Near Conway's cornfield I think.

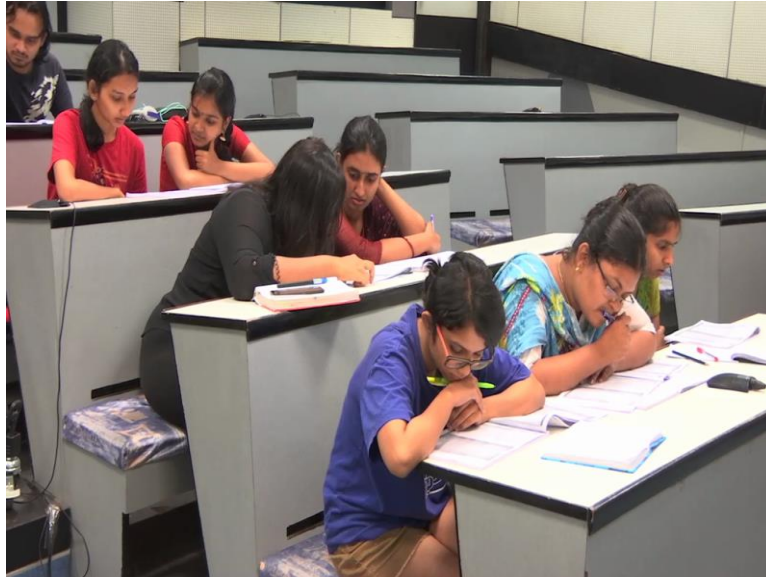
Student: It wasn't necessary to go so far. There was a bunch exactly like this in the garbage can this morning.

Student: Oh, I can't believe it. What a nasty thing to do! And I suppose you have just as fine an excuse for being an hour late to breakfast this morning and last week. I haven't wanted to tell you these things but

Student: There's a bell.

Student: Ad, ab, ante, in, de

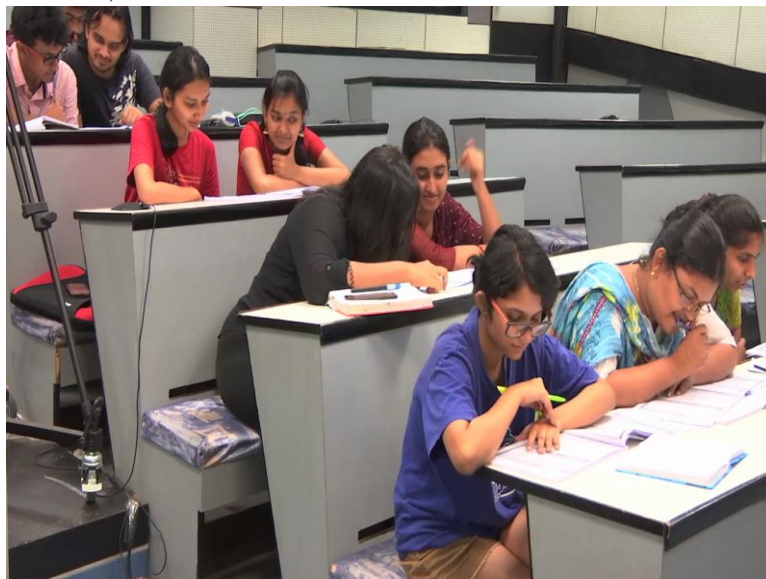
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Student: inter, con, post, pra

Professor: Now she is practicing her prefixes in Latin.

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Student: I can't seem to remember the rest.

Student: Pre, pro, sub, super. Don't worry, Lois. You will come out all right.

Student: Wait a minute, Mary

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Professor: Reluctantly Mary turns back

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Student: Mary, I've had the feeling

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Student: and I don't think I am wrong, that the girls here were happy, that they like Miss Dobie and me, that they like the school. Do you think that's true?

Student: It's time I have to get my Latin book.

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Student: I thought it was true until you came here a year ago. I don't think you are very happy here and I would like to find out why.

Professor: Looks at Mary,

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Professor: waits for an answer, gets none

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Professor: and shakes her head.

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Student: Why, for Why, for example do you find it necessary to lie to necessary to lie to us so often?

Student: I am not lying. When I was walking, I saw the flowers and they looked pretty and I didn't know it was so late.

Student: Stop it Mary, I am not interested in hearing that foolish story again. I know you got the flowers out of the garbage can. What I do want to know is why you feel you to lie out of it?

Student: I did pick the flowers in Conway's.

Student: You never believe me. You believe everybody but me. It is always like that. Everything I say you fuss at me about. Everything I do is wrong.

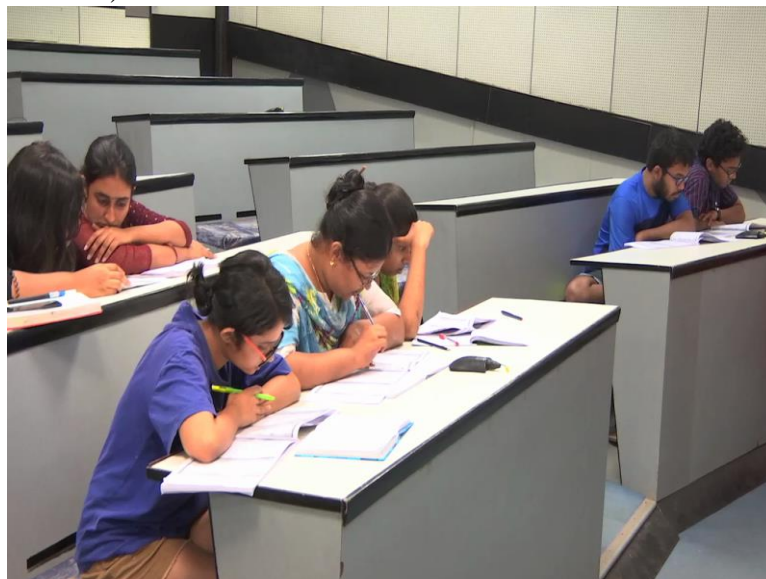
Student: You know that isn't true.

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Professor: Goes to Mary, puts her arm around her, waits until the sobbing has stopped.

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Student: Look Mary, look at me. Let's try to understand each other. If you feel that you have to take a walk, or you just can't come to class, or that you would like to go into the village by yourself, come and tell me. I will try and understand. I don't say I will always agree that you should do exactly what want to do. But I had feelings like that, too, everybody has and I won't be unreasonable about yours. But this way, the kind of lying you do, makes everything wrong.

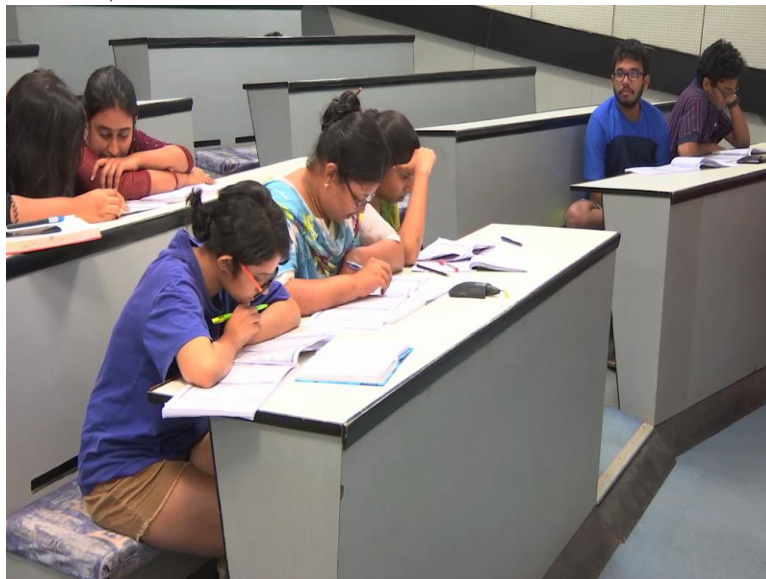
Student: I got the flowers nears Conway's Cornfield.

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Professor: Karen looks at Mary, sighs, moves back towards desk and stands there for a moment.

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Student: Well there doesn't seem any other was with you. You will have to be punished. Take your recreation periods alone for the next two weeks. No horse-back riding and no hockey. Don't leave the school grounds for any reason whatsoever, is that clear?

Student: Saturday too?

Student: Yes

Student: But you said I would go to the boat race.

Student: I am sorry but you can't go.

Student: I will tell my grandmother. I will tell her how everybody treats me here and the way I get punished for every little thing that I do. I will tell her, I will tell

Student: Why, I'd slap her hands

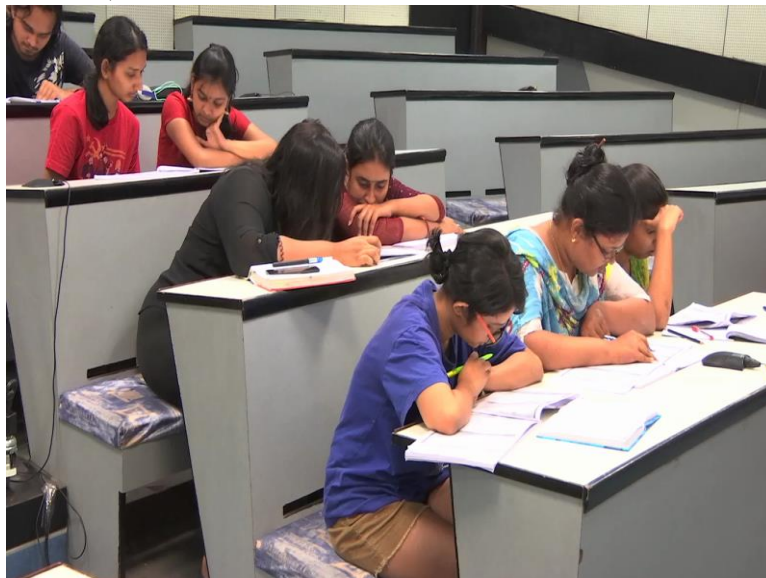
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Professor: Karen turning back from the door, ignoring Mrs. Mortar's speech to Mary.

Student: Go upstairs, Mary

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Student: I don't feel well.

Student: Go upstairs, now.

Student: I have got a pain. I have had it all morning. It hurts her, right here.

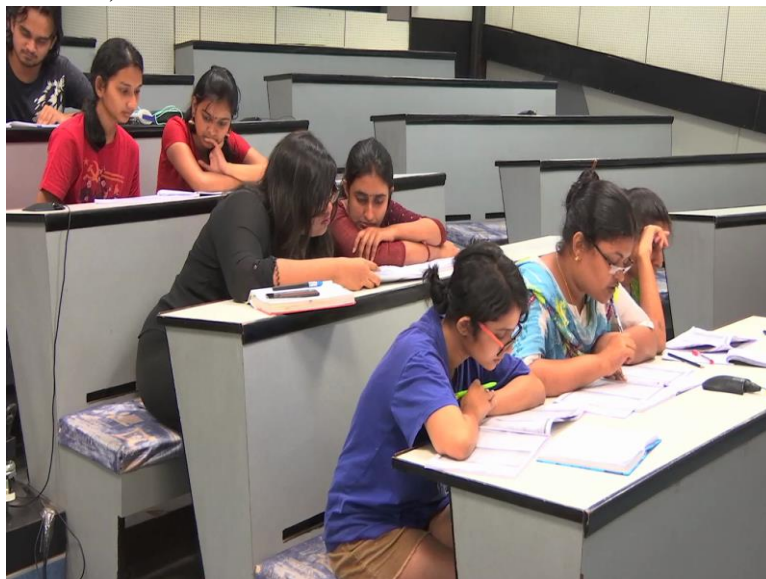
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Professor: Pointing vaguely in the direction of her heart.

Student: Really, it does.

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Student: Ask Miss Dobie to give you some hot water and bicarbonate of soda.

Student: Its bad pain. I have never had it before.

Student: I don't think it can be very serious.

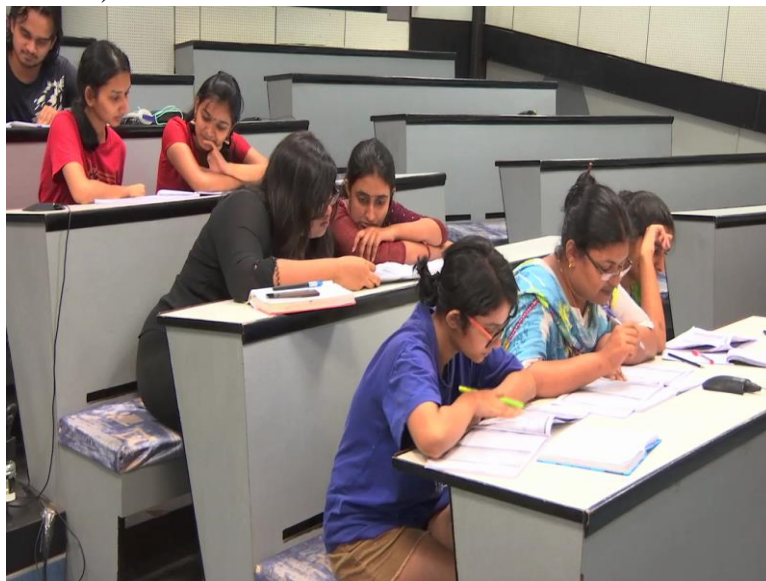
Student: My heart, it's my heart! It's stopping or something. I can't breathe.

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Professor: She takes a long breath and falls awkwardly to the door, to the floor.

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Professor: Karen sighs, shakes her head, kneels beside Mary. To Mrs. Mortar

Student: Ask Martha to phone Joe.

Student: Do you think heart trouble is very serious in a child?

Professor: Karen picks Mary up from the floor

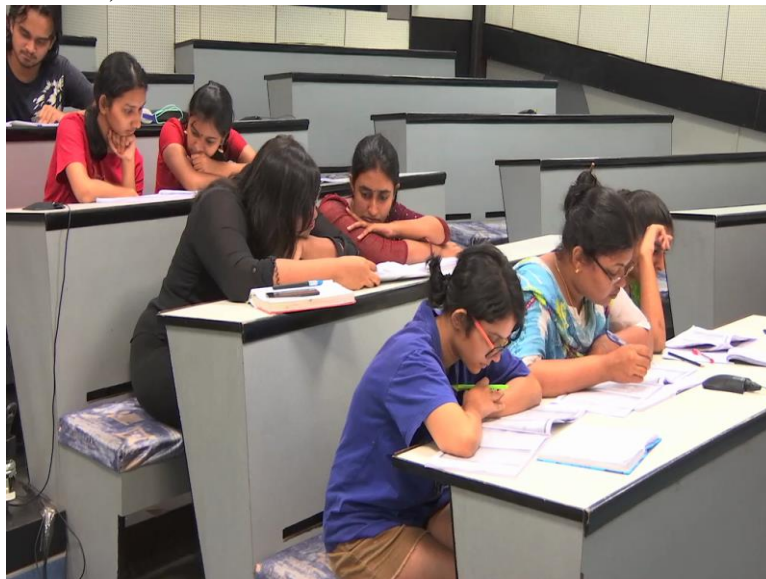
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Professor: and carries her off right. After moment, Martha Dobie enters center. She is about the same age as Karen. She is a nervous, high strung woman.

Student: Did you get Joe?

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Student: What happened to her? She was perfectly well a few hours ago.

Student: She probably still is. I told her she couldn't go to the boat races and she had a heart attack.

Student: Where is she?

Student: In there. Mortar's with her.

Student: Anything really wrong with her?

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Student: I doubt it.

Professor: Sits down at desk

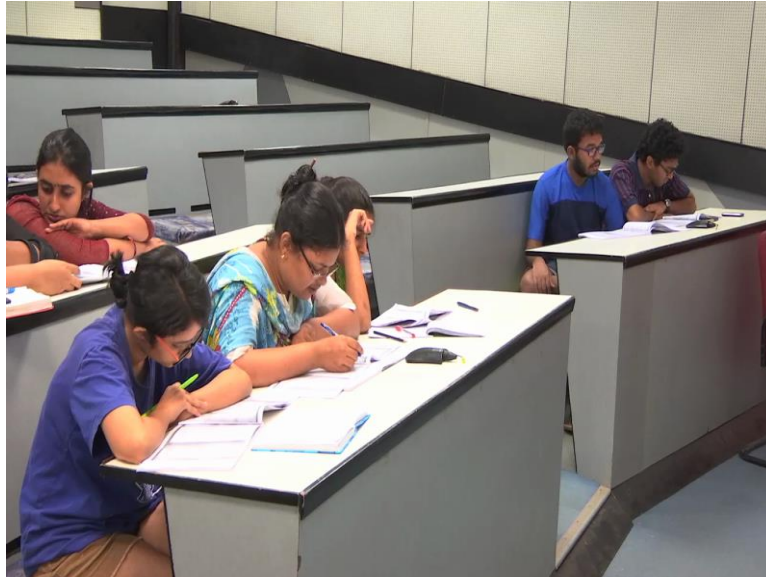
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Professor: and begins to mark papers.

Student: She's a problem, that kid.

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Student: Her latest trick was kidding your aunt of a sewing lesson with those faded flowers we threw out. Then she threatened to go to her grandmother with some tale about being mistreated.

Student: And please God, grandma would believe her and take her away.

Student: Which would give the school a swell black eye but we ought to do something.

Student: How about having a talk with Mrs. Tilford?

Student: You want to do it?

Professor: Martha shakes her head.

Student: I hate to do it. She's been so nice to us. Anyway, it wouldn't do any good. She is too crazy about Mary to see her faults very clearly and the kid knows it.

Student: How about asking Joe to say something to her? She'd listen to him.

Student: That would be admitting that we can't do the job ourselves.

Student: Well we can't and we might as well admit it. We have tried everything we can think of. She's had more attention than any other three kids put together. And we still haven't the faintest idea what goes on inside her head.

Student: She is a strange girl.

Student: That is putting it mildly.

Student: It's funny. We always talk about the child as if she were a grown woman.

Student: It's not so funny. There is something the matter with the kid. That's been true ever since the first day she came. She causes trouble here. She is bad for the other girls. I don't know what it is. It's a feeling I have got, that its wrong somewhere.

Student: Alright, alright we will talk it over with Joe. Now what about our other pet nuisance?

Student: My aunt, the actress? What's been up to now?

Student: Nothing unusual. Last night at dinner, she was telling the girls about the time she lost her trunks in Butte, Montana and how she gave her best performance of Rosalind during a hurricane. Today in the kitchen you could hear her on what Sir Henry said to her.

Student: Wait until she does Hedda Gabler standing on the chair. Sir Henry taught her to do it that way. He said it was a real test of great acting.

Student: You must have had a gay childhood.

Student: Oh, I did. I did, indeed. God, how I used to hate all that!

Student: Couldn't we get rid of her soon, Martha? I hate to make it hard on you, but she really ought not to be here.

Student: I know

Student: We can scrape up enough money to send her away. Let's do it.

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Professor: Goes to her affectionately, pats her head.

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Student: You've been very patient about it. I'm sorry I will talk to her today. It'll probably be a week or two before she can be ready to leave. Is that all right?

Student: Of course. Did you get Joe himself on the phone?

Student: He was already on his way. Isn't he always on his way here?

Student: Well I am going to marry him someday, you know.

Student: You haven't talked of marriage for a long time.

Student: I have talked of it with Joe.

Student: Then you are thinking about it, soon?

Student: Perhaps when the term is over. By that time, we ought to be out of debt and the school should be paying for itself.

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Professor: Nervously playing with a book on the table.

Student: Then we won't be taking our vacation together?

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Student: Of course we will; the three of us.

Student: I had been looking forward to some place by the lake, just you and me, the way we used to at college.

Student: Well, now there will be three of us. That will be fun, too.

Student: Why haven't you told me this before?

Student: I am not telling you anything we haven't talked about often.

Student: But you are talking about it as soon now.

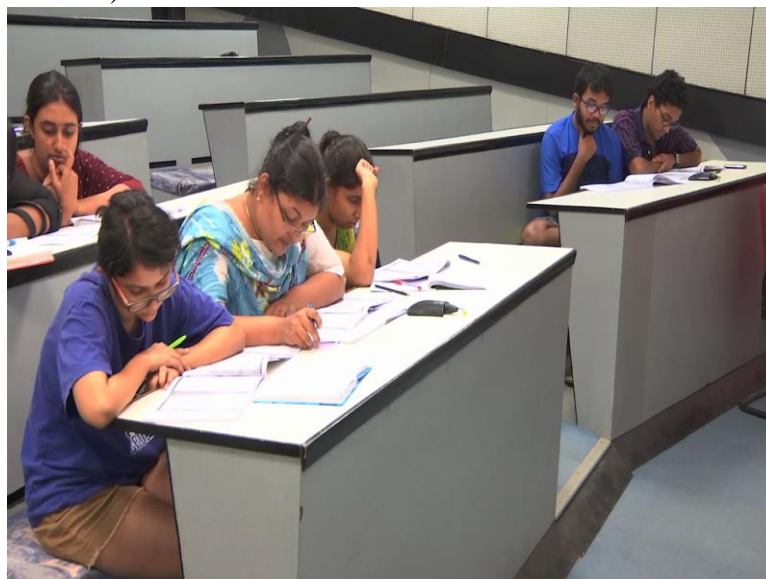
Student: I am glad to be able to. I have been in love with Joe a long time.

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Professor: Martha crosses to window and stands looking out, her back to Karen. Karen finishes marking papers and rises.

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Student: It's a big day for the school. Rosalie's finally put an i the could, in could.

Professor: Put an l in could

Student: l, oh sorry. Rosalie finally put an l in could.

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Professor: Martha in a dull, bitter tone not turning from window.

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Student: You really are going to leave, aren't you?

Student: I am not going to leave and you know it. Why do you say things like that? We agreed a long time ago that my marriage wasn't going to make any difference to the school.

Student: But it will, you know it will. It can't help it.

Student: That's nonsense. Joe doesn't want me to give up here.

Student: I don't understand you. It's been so damned hard building this thing up, slaving and going without things to make ends meet. Think of having a winter coat without holes in the lining again. And when we are getting on our feet, you are all ready to let it go hell.

Student: This is a silly argument, Martha. Let's quit it. You haven't listened to a word I have said I am not getting married tomorrow and when I do, it's not going to interfere with my work here. You're making something out of nothing.

Student: It's going to be hard going on alone afterward.

Student: For God's sake do you expect me to give up my marriage?

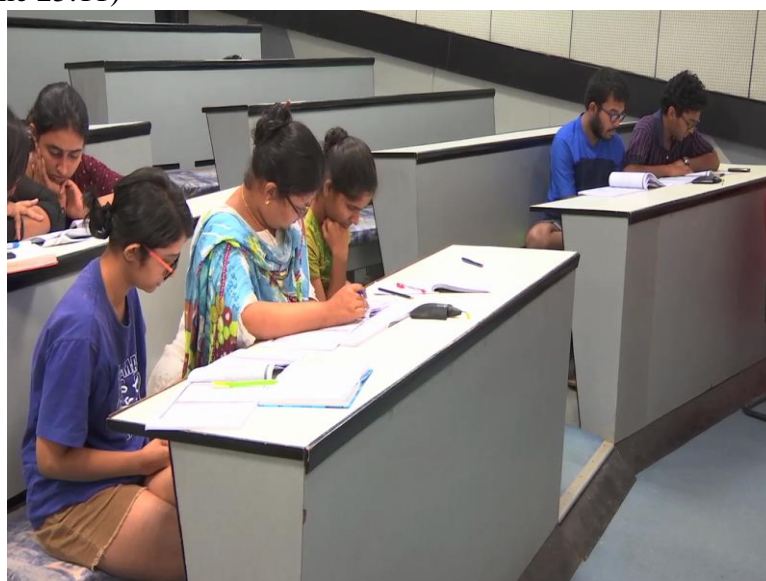
Student: I don't mean that, but it's so

(Refer Slide Time 24:58)



Professor: Door center opens and Doctor Joseph Cardin comes in. He is a large, pleasant looking, carelessly dressed man of about 35. Pranjal, read for Joe.

(Refer Slide Time 25:11)



Student: Hello darling, hi Martha, what's the best news?

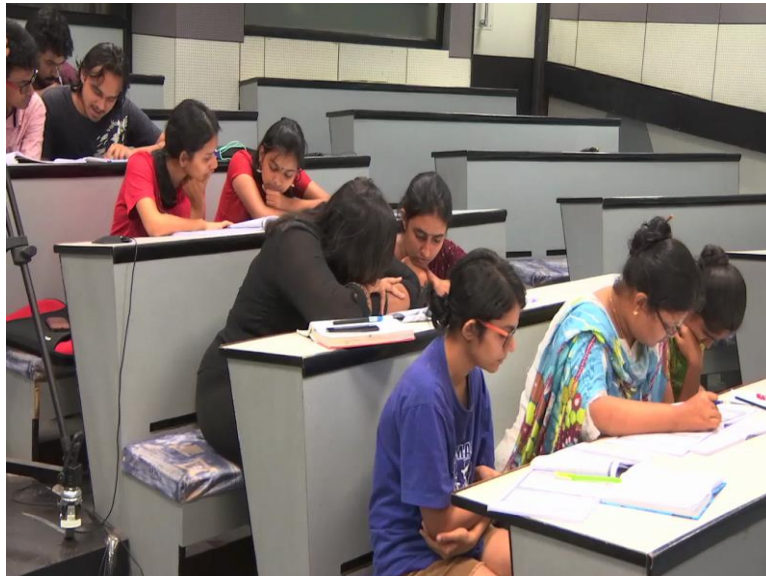
Student: Hello Joe

Student: We tried to get you on the phone. Come in and look at your little cousin.

Student: Sure, what's the matter with her now? He stopped over knees on the way over to look at black wool he bought. It's big. There is going to be plenty of good breathing done in these things.

Student: You'd better come and see her. She says she has a pain in her heart.

(Refer Slide Time 25:37)



Student: Our little Mary pops up in every day's dispatches.

Student: Go and see her. Heart attacks are nothing to play with.

Student: Never played with one in my life.

(Refer Slide Time 25:48)



Professor: Martha walks round the room and finally goes out to stare out window. Mrs. Mortar enters right.

(Refer Slide Time 25:55)



Student: I was asked to leave the room. Seems that I am not wanted in the room during the examination

Student: What difference does it make?

Student: What difference does it make? Why, it was a deliberate stub.

Student: There is very little pleasure in watching a man use a stethoscope.

Student: Isn't it natural that the child should have me with her? Isn't it natural that an older woman should be present? Very well, if are so thick-skinned that you don't resent these things

Student: What are you talking about? Why, in the name of Heaven, should you be with her?

(Refer Slide Time 26:18)



Student: It, it is customary for an older woman to be present during an examination.

Student: Tell that to Joe. May be he will give you a job as a duenna for his office.

Student: It was I who saved Delia Lampert's life the time she had that heart attack in Buffalo. We almost lost her that time. Poor Delia! We went over to London together. She married Robert Laffornne. Not 7 months later, he left her and ran away with Eve Cloun who was playing the Infant Phenomenon in Birmingham

Student: Console yourself. If you have seen one heart attack, you have seen them all.

Student: So you don't resent your aunt being snubbed and humiliated?

Student: Oh, Aunt Lily

Student: Karen is consistently rude to me and you know it.

Student: I know she is very polite to you and what's more important, very patient

Student: Patient with me, I who worked my fingers to the bone?

Student: Don't tell yourself that too often, Aunt Lily, you will come to believe it.

Student: I know it's true. Where could you gotten a woman of my reputation to give these children voice lessons, elocution lessons? Patient with me! Here I have donated my services

Student: I was under the impression you were being paid.

Student: That's small thing. I used to earn twice that for one performance.

Student: The gilded days. It was very extravagant of them to pay you so much.

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Professor: Suddenly tired of the whole thing

(Refer Slide Time 27:31)



Student: You aren't very happy here, are you, Aunt Lily?

Student: Satisfied enough, I guess, for a poor relation.

Student: But you don't like the school or the farm or

Student: I told you at the beginning you shouldn't have bought a place like this. Burying yourself on the farm, you will regret it.

Student: We like it here. Aunt Lily, you talked about London for a long time. Would you like to go over?

Student: It's been twenty years; I shall never live to see it again.

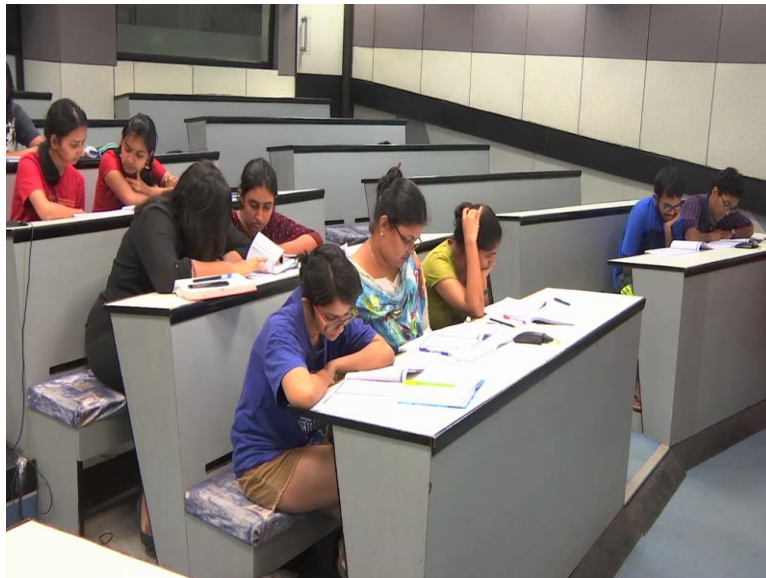
Student: Well you can go any time you like. We can spare the money now. And it will do a lot of good. You pick out the boat you want and I will get the passage.

(Refer Slide Time 28:01)



Professor: She has been taking rapidly anxious to end the whole thing.

(Refer Slide Time 28:05)



Student: Now that's all fixed, you will have a grand time seeing all your old friends and if you live sensibly I ought to be able to let you have enough to get along on.

Professor: She begins to gather books, notebooks and pencils.

Student: So you want me to leave?

Student: That's not the way to put it. If you want to go over ever since I remember

Student: You are trying to get rid of me.

Student: That's it. We don't want you around when we dig the buried treasure.

Student: So you are turning me out. At my age! Nice, grateful girl you are.

Student: Oh my God, how can anyone deal with you? You are going where you want to go and we will be better off alone. That suits everybody. You complain about the farm, you complain about the school, you complain about Karen and now you have got what you want, and you are still looking for something to complain about.

Student: Please don't raise your voice.

Student: You ought to be glad I don't do worse.

Student: I absolutely refuse to be shipped off 3000 miles away. I am not going to England. I shall go back to stage. I will write to my agents tomorrow and as soon as they have something good for me

Student: The truth is L would like you to leave soon. The three of us can't live together and it doesn't make any difference whose fault it is.

Student: You wish me to go tonight.

Student: Don't act, Aunt Lily. Go as soon as you have found a place you like. I'll put money in the bank for you tomorrow.

Student: You think I would take your money? I would rather scrub floors first.

Student: I imagine you will change your mind.

Student: I should have known by this time that the wise thing is to stay out of your way when he is in the house.

Student: What are you talking about now?

Student: Never mind, I should have known better. You always take your spite out on me.

Student: Spite? Don't let's have any more of this today. I am tired. I have been working since 6 o'clock this morning.

Student: Any day that he is in the house is a bad day

Student: When who is in the house?

Student: Don't think you are fooling me, young lady. I wasn't born yesterday

Student: Aunt Lily, the amount of disconnected unpleasantness that goes on in your head could keep a psychologist busy for years. Now go, take your nap.

Student: I know what I know. Every time that man comes into this house, you have a fit. It seems like you just can't stand the idea of them being together. God knows what you will do when they get married. You are jealous of him, that's what it is.

(Refer Slide Time 30:01)



Professor: Martha, her voice is tense and the previous attitude of good natured irritation is gone.

(Refer Slide Time 30:06)



Student: I am very fond of Joe and you know it.

Student: You are fonder of Karen and I know that. And it is unnatural as it can be. You don't like their being together. You were always like that even as a child. If you had a little girl friend you always got mad when she liked anybody else. Well, you better get a beau of your own now, a woman of your age.

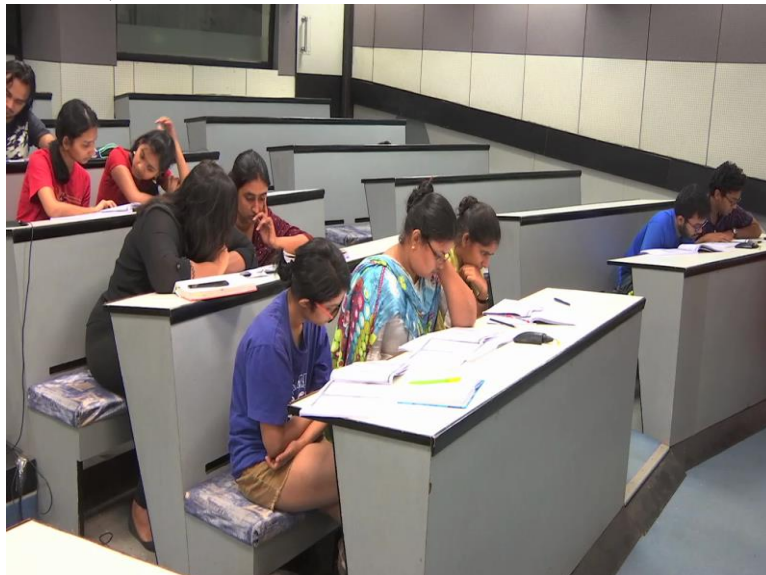
Student: The sooner you get of here, the better. Your vulgarities are making me sick and I won't stand for it any longer. I want you to leave.

(Refer Slide Time 30:31)



Professor: At this point there is a sound outside the larger doors center. Martha breaks off angry and ashamed. After a moment, she crosses to the door and opens it. Evelyn and Peggy are to be seen on the staircase. For a second, she stands still as they stop and look at her. Then afraid that anger with her aunt will color anything she might say anything to the children, she crosses the room again and stands with her back to them

(Refer Slide Time 31:00)



Student: What were you doing outside the door?

Student: We were going upthairth, Mith Dobie.

Student: We came down to see how Mary was.

Student: And you stopped long enough to see how we were. Did you deliberately listen?

Student: We didn't need to. We heard voices and we couldn't help

Student: Eavesdropping is something nice young ladies just don't do.

Student: Go upstairs now; we will talk about this later.

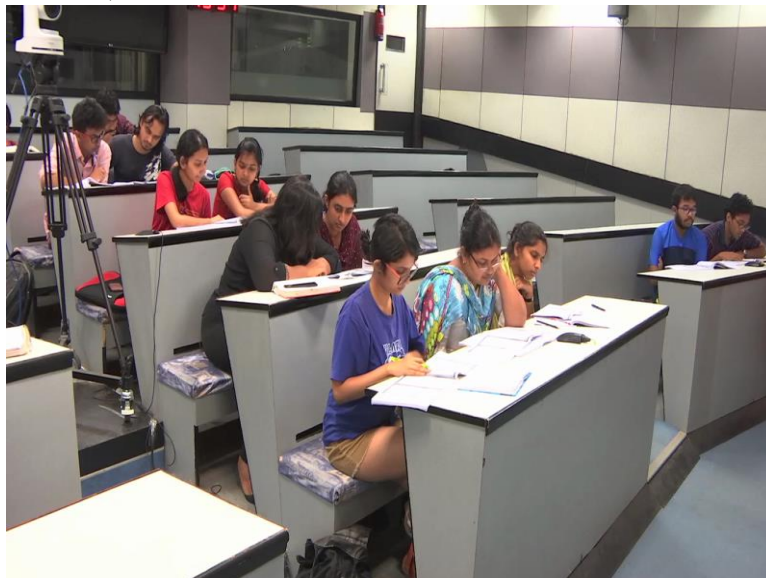
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Professor: Slowly shuts door as they begin to climb the stairs.

Student: You mean to say you are not going to do anything about that? That's the trouble these new fangled notions of discipline and

(Refer Slide Time 31:37)



Student: You know it is really bad having you around children

Student: What exactly does that mean?

Student: It means that I don't like them hearing the things you say. Oh, I will do something about it. But the truth is that, this is their home. And things shouldn't be said in it that they can't hear. When you are at your best, you are not for tender ears.

Student: So now it is my fault, is it? Just as I said, whenever he is in the house, you can take it out on me. You have got some way to let out steam and

Student: How is Mary?

(Refer Slide Time 32:06)



Professor: Mrs. Mortar, head in air, gives Martha a malicious half smile and makes, what she thinks is majestic exit, center. Mrs. Mortar

Student: Good day Joseph.

Student: What's the matter with the Duchess?

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Student: Just keeping her hand in, in case Sir Henry's watching her from above. What about Mary?

Student: Nothing, absolutely nothing

Student: I thought so.

Student: I could have managed a better faint than that when I was 6 years old.

Student: Nothing the matter with her at all, then?

Student: No, ma'am, nothing. Just little something she thought up.

Student: That is such a silly thing to do. She knew we would have me in. May be she is not so bright. Any idiots in your family, Joe? Any inbreeding?

Student: Don't blame her on me. It's another side of the family. You can look at Aunt Amelia and tell, Old England stock, never married out of Boston, still thinks honor is honor and dinner's at eight thirty. Yes ma'am, we are proud old breed.

Student: The Jukes were an old family too. Look Joe, have you any idea what is the matter with Mary? I mean, has she always been like this?

Professor: She has always been a honey. Aunt Amelia's spoiling hasn't helped any, even.

Student: We are reaching the end of our rope with her; this kind of thing?

Student: Aren't you taking this too seriously?

Student: I guess I am. But you stay around kids long enough and you won't know what to take seriously either. But I do think somebody ought to talk to Mrs. Tilford about her.

Student: You won't be meaning me now, would you, Mss Dobie?

Student: Well Karen and I were talking about it this afternoon and

Student: Listen friend, I am marrying Karen but I am not writing Mary Tilford in the contract.

(Refer Slide Time 33:50)



Professor: Martha moves slightly. Cardin takes him again. Cardin takes her by the shoulders and turns her around to face him again. His face is grave, his voice gentle

(Refer Slide Time 34:04)



Student: Forget Mary for a minute. You and I have got something to fight for. Every time anything's said about marrying, about Karen marrying me, you, I am fond of you. Always thought you liked me. What's it? I know how fond you are of Karen but our marriage oughtn't make a great deal of difference.

Professor: Martha

Student: Pushing his hand, God damn you, I wish.

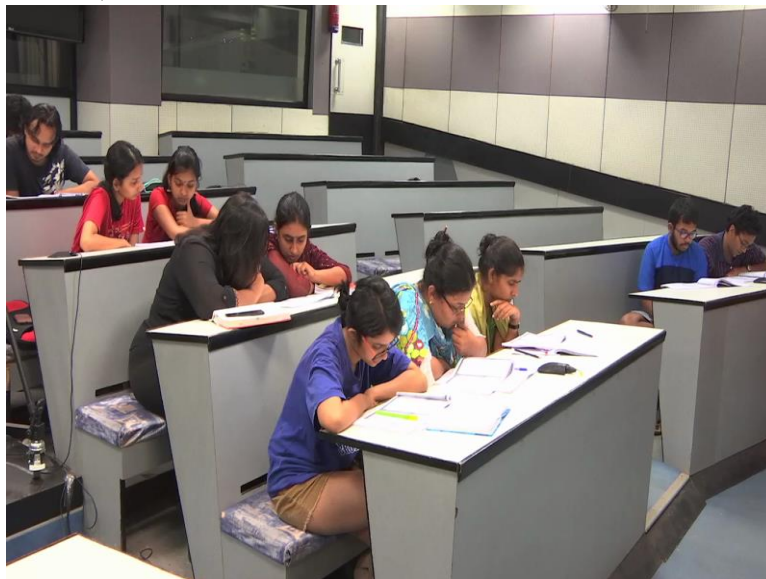
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Professor: She puts her face in her hands. Cardin watches her in silence, mechanically lighting a cigarette. When she takes her hands from her face, she holds them out at him, contritely

Student: Joe, please. I am sorry.

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Student: I am a fool, a nasty, bitter

Professor: Cardin takes her hands in one of his, patting them with his other hand.

Student: Aw, shut up

Professor: He puts an arm around her

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Professor: and she leans her head against her lapel. They are standing like that when Karen comes in, right.

(Refer Slide Time 35:01)



Student: Your friend has got a nice shoulder to weep on.

Student: He is an admirable man in every way. Well the angel child is now putting her clothes back on.

Student: The angel child's influence is abroad even while she is unconscious. Her roommates were busy listening at the door while Aunt Lily and I were yelling at each other.

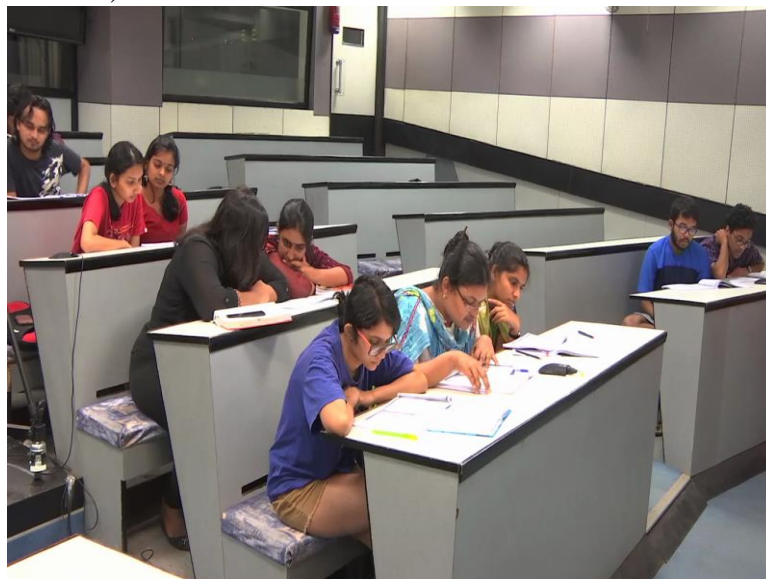
Student: We will have to move those girls away from each other.

(Refer Slide Time 35:23)



Professor: A bell rings from the rear of the house

(Refer Slide Time 35:25)



Student: That's my class. I will send Peggy and Evelyn down. You talk to them.

Student: Alright. Mary!

Professor: Mary opens door, comes in

(Refer Slide Time 35:34)



Professor: standing buttoning the neck of her dress.

(Refer Slide Time 35:37)



Student: My heart hurts.

Student: Science failed. Try hairbrush

Student: It's my heart and it hurts.

Student: Sit down

Student: I want to see my grandmother. I want to

(Refer Slide Time 35:52)



Professor: Evelyn and Peggy timidly enter center

(Refer Slide Time 35:53)



Student: Sit down girls; I want to talk to you.

Student: We are awfully sorry, really. We just didn't think

Student: I am sorry too, Peggy.

Student: You and Evelyn never used to do things like this. We will have to separate you three.

Student: Ah, Mith Wright. We have been together almost a year.

Student: It was evidently too long. Now let's talk about it. Peggy, you will move into Lois's room and Lois will move in with Evelyn. Marie will go in with Rosalie.

Student: Rosalie hates me.

Student: That is a very stupid thing to say. I can't imagine Rosalie hating anyone.

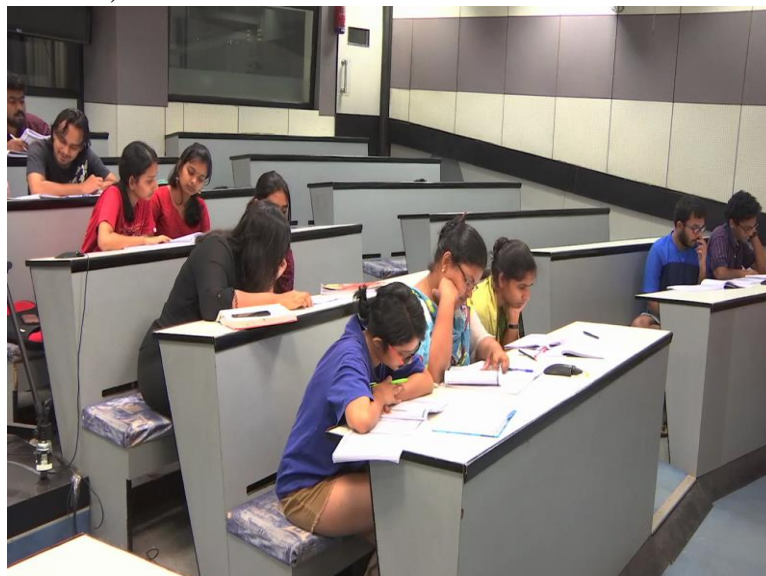
Student: It's all because I had a pain. If anybody else is sick, they would be put to bed and petted. You are always mean to me. I get blamed and punished for everything. I do, Cousin Joe. All the time for everything

(Refer Slide Time 36:39)



Professor: Mary by now is crying violently and as Karen half moves towards her, Cardin who has been frowning picks Mary up and puts her down on the couch.

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Student: You have been unpleasant enough to Miss Wright. Lie here until you have stopped working yourself into a fit.

(Refer Slide Time 36:55)



Professor: Picks up his hat and bag, smiles at Karen.

(Refer Slide Time 36:58)



Student: I have got to go now. She's not going to hurt herself, crying. The next time she faints, I will wait until she got tired lying on the floor.

(Refer Slide Time 37:06)



Professor: Passing Mary, he pats her head. She jerks away from him

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Student: Wait a minute; i will walk to the car with you. Go up now and move your things.
Tell Lois to get her stuff ready.

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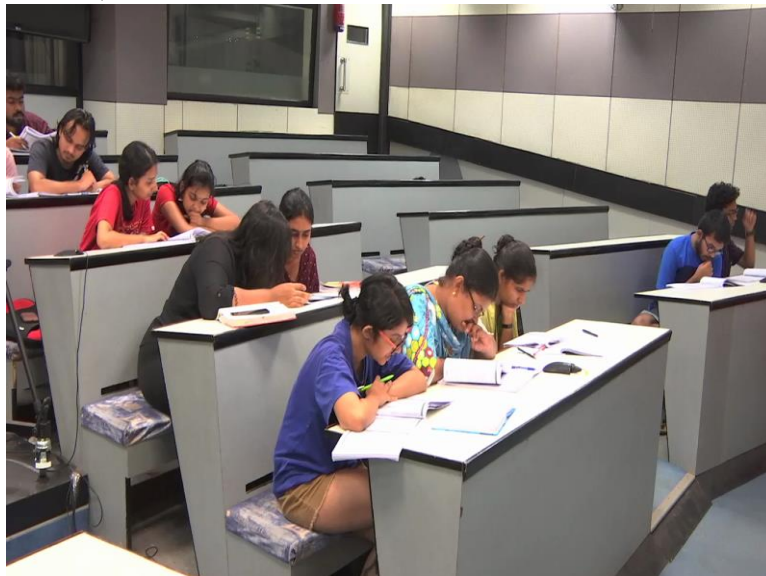


Professor: She and Cardin exit center. A second after the door is closed; Mary springs up and throws the cushion at the door.

Student: Don't do that. She can hear you.

Student: Who cares if she does?

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Student: And she can hear that too.

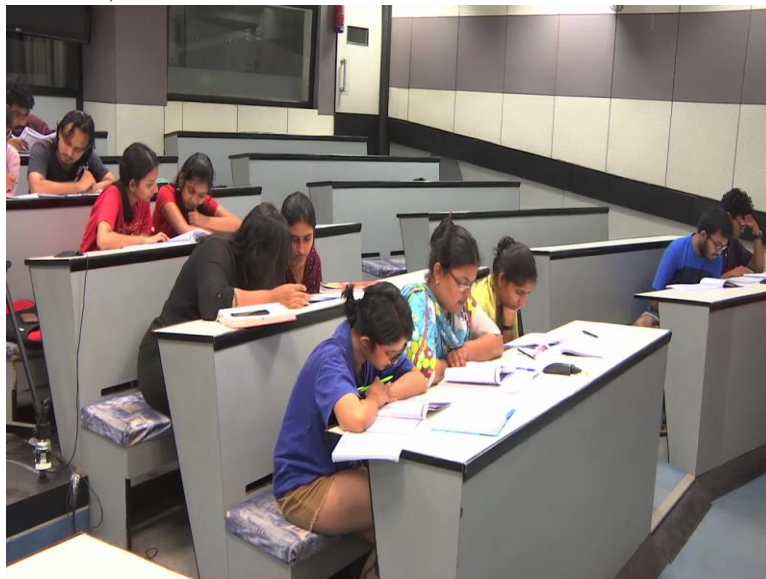
Professor: Small ornament falls off table

(Refer Slide Time 37:28)



Professor: and, small ornament falls off table and breaks on floor. Evelyn and Peggy gasp and Mary's bravado disappears for a moment.

(Refer Slide Time 37:39)



Student: What are you going to do?

Student: You will get the devil now. Doctor Cardin gave it to Miss Wright. I guess it was kind of lover's gift. People get awfully angry about lover's gift.

Student: Oh, leave it alone. She will never know we did it.

Student: We didn't do it. You did it yourself.

Student: And what will you do if I say we did it? Never mind, I will think of something else.

The wind could have knocked it over.

Student: Yeah, she is going to believe that one.

Student: Oh, stop worrying about it. I will get out of it.

Student: Did you really have a pain?

Student: I fainted, didn't it?

Student: I wish I could faint sometimes. I have never even worn glasses like Rosalie.

Student: A lot it will get you to faint.

Student: What did Mith Wright do to you when the clast left?

Student: Told me I couldn't go to the boat races.

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Student: Whew!

Student: We would remember everything that happens and we will give you all the souvenirs and things.

Student: I won't let you go if I can't go. But I will find some way to go. What were you doing?

Student: I guess we shouldn't have done it really. We came down to see what's happening to you but the doors were closed and we could hear Miss Dobie and Mortar having an awful row. Then Miss Dobie opens the door and there we were.

Student: And a lot of crawling and crying you both did too, I bet.

Student: We were thort of thorry about lithening. I gueth it wathn't

Student: Ah, you are always sorry about everything. What were they saying?

Student: What was who saying?

Student: Dobie and Mortar, silly

Student: Just talking, I guess

Student: Fighting

Student: About what?

Student: Well they were talking about Mortar going away to England and

Student: You know it really wasn't very nice to have listened, and I think it is worse to tell.

Student: You do, do you? You just don't tell me and see what happens.

Student: Mortar got awful thore at that and thaid they juth wanted to get rid of her and then they tharted talking about Dr. Cardin.

Student: What about him?

Student: We'd be better get start moving. Miss Wright will be back first thing we know.

Student: Shut up! Go on, Evelyn

Student: They are going to be married.

Student: Everybody knows that.

Student: But everybody doesn't know that Miss Dobie doesn't want them to get married. How do you like that?

(Refer Slide Time 39:48)



Professor: The door opens and Rosalie Well sticks her head in.

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Student: I have a class soon. If you are going to move your things

Student: Close that door, you idiot. What do you want?

Student: I am trying to tell you. If you are going to move your things, not that I want you in with me, you would better start right now. Miss Wright is coming in a minute.

Student: Who cares if she is?

Student: I am just telling you for your own good.

Student: We are coming.

Student: No, let Rosalie move our things

Student: You crazy?

Student: It's all right. Evelyn and I will get your things. Come on, Evelyn

Student: Try to get out of telling me. Well, you won't get out of it that way. Sit down and stop being such a sissy. Rosalie, you go up and move my things and don't say a word of our being down here.

Student: And who was your French maid yesterday, Mary Tilford?

Student: You will do it here. Go Rosalie and fix our things.

Student: Next time, we go into town, I will let you wear gold locket and buckle. You will like that, won't you?

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Professor: Rosalie draws back, moves her hands nervously.

(Refer Slide Time 40:44)



Student: I don't know what you are talking about

Student: I am not talking about anything in particular. You run along now and remind me the next time to get my buckle and locket.

Student: Alright I will do it this time but just because I got a good disposition. But don't think you are going to boss me around, Mary Tilford.

Student: No indeed. And things are neat. You don't miss my white linen bloomers.

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Professor: The door slams as Mary laughs.

Student: Now what do you think of that? What made her so confused?

Student: Oh, a little secret we got. Go on now, what else did they say?

Student: Well, Mortar said that Dobie was jealous of them and she was like that when she was a little girl, and

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Student: she better get herself a beau of her own because it was unnatural and that she never wanted anybody to like Miss Wright and that was unnatural. Boy! Did Miss Dobie get sore on that!

Student: Then we didn't hear anything.

Student: What does she mean Dobie was jealous?

Student: What's unnatural?

Student: Un for not, not natural.

Student: It's funny because everybody gets married.

Student: A lot of people don't. They are too ugly.

Student: Oh my God. Rosalie will find the copy of *Memoiselle de Maupin*. She will blab like the dickens.

Student: She won't say a word.

Student: Who geth the book when we move?

Student: You can have it. That's what I was doing this morning, finishing it. There is one part in it

Student: What wath it?

Student: Wait until you read it.

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Student: Who forget to give it to me?

Student: It's a shame about being moved. I have to go in with Helen and she blows her nose all night. Lois told me.

Student: It was a dirty trick making us move. She just wants to see how much fun she can take away from me. She hates me.

Student: No, she doesn't, Mary. She treats you just like the rest of us, almost better.

Student: That's right, stick up for your crush. Take her side against mine

Student: I didn't mean it that way.

Student: We'd better get upthairth

Student: I am not going.

Student: Rosalie isn't so bad.

Student: What you going to dot about the vathe?

Student: I don't care about Rosalie and I don't care about the vase. I am not going to be here.

Student: Not going to be here? What do you mean?

Student: I am going home.

Student: Oh Mary

Student: You can't do that.

Student: Can't I? You just watch. I am not staying here. I am going home and tell Grandma I'm not staying anymore. I will tell her I am not happy. They are scared of her. She helped them when they first started, you know and when she tells them something, believe me, they will sit up and listen. They can't get away with treating me like this and they don't have to think they can.

Student: You just going to walk out like that?

Student: What you going to tell your grandmother?

Student: Who cares? I will think of something to tell her. I can always do it better on the spur of the moment.

Student: She will send you right back.

Student: You don't need worry about that. Grandma is very fond of me. I heard my father was her favorite son; I can manage her alright,

Student: I don't think you ought to go really, Mary. It's just going to make awful lot of trouble.

Student: What's going to happen about the vathe?

Student: Say I did it. It doesn't make a bit of difference any more. Now, listen. You two got to help. They won't miss me before diner if you make Rosalie shut the door and keep it shut. Now I will go through field to French's and then I can get the bus to Homestead.

Student: How you going to get the threetcar?

Student: Taxi, idiot.

Student: How are you going to get out of here in the first place?

Student: I am going to walk out. You know where the front door is. Or are you too dumb even for that?

(Refer Slide Time 44:06)



Student: I am going right out that front door.

Student: Gee, you wouldn't.

Student: Of course you wouldn't. You'd let them do anything to you they want. Well, they can't do anything to do to me. Who's got any money?

Student: Not me, not a thent.

Student: I have got to have

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Student: at least a dollar for the taxi and a dime for the bus.

Student: And where you going to find it?

Student: See? Why don't you just wait until your allowance comes Monday, and then you can go anyplace you want? May be by that time

Student: I am going today, now.

Student: You can't walk to Lanther.

Student: You've got money. You've got two dollars and twenty five cents.

Student: I, I

Student: Go get it for me.

Student: No! No, I won't get it for you.

Student: You can't have that money, Mary

Student: Get it for me.

Student: I won't. I won't. Mamma doesn't send me much allowance, not half as much as the test of you get. I saved this so long. You took it from me last time.

Student: Ah, she wantth the bithycle tho bad.

Student: I haven't gone to the movies, I haven't had any candy, I haven't had had anything the rest of you get all the time. It took me so long to save that and I

Student: Go upstairs and get me the money.

Student: I won't. I won't. I won't.

(Refer Slide Time 45:14)



Professor: Mary makes a sudden move for her, grabs her left arm and jerks it back, hard and expertly. Peggy screams softly. Evelyn tries to take Mary's arm away. Without releasing her hold on Peggy, Mary slaps Evelyn's face. Evelyn begins to cry.

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Student: Just say when you've had enough.

Student: All, alright, I will get it.

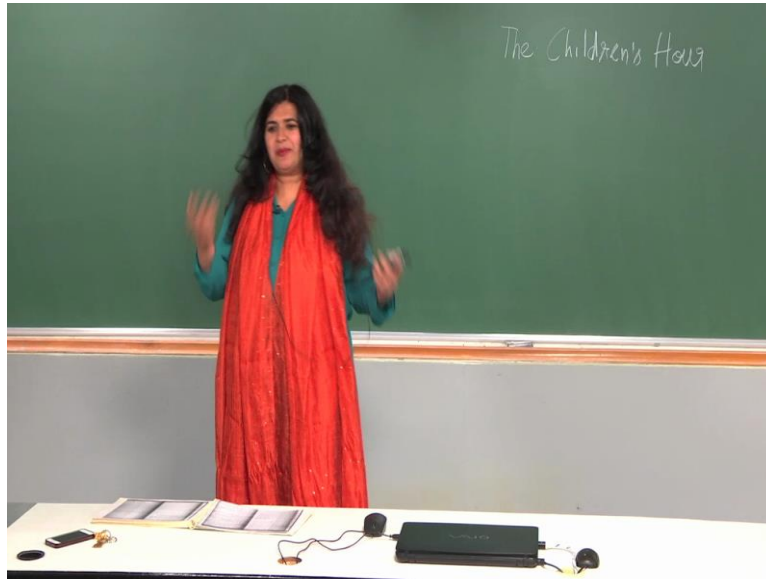
Professor: Mary smiles, nods her head

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Professor: as the curtain falls.

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Professor: Yes, comments please now. See, there is a, I have already set the background of the play. Why the playwright chose just this kind of the theme, what is the theme all about? How many ideas are put forward? And it's a very richly layered text. That I am sure you could understand. So many things happen.

Student: Children are bad

Professor: Between the adults and the children, between the children themselves and between adults and adults. So comment now. No fun is in me trying to tell you everything. So let the answers come from you. Namita, we begin with you. Anything, any comment.

(Refer Slide Time 46:28)



Student: I think it is interesting. It is the woman writer and she shows the children especially, evil is probably strong word, but they don't seem nice, they aren't innocent and naive, especially Mary's character, it's quite outrageous for a child.

Professor: Yes

Student: So I think it is a woman writer, actually woman characters and it's still not like a, she will have blessings from God or there is a glorious motherhood over here.

Professor: So you challenge the notion of having children in the first place. Ok, boys here

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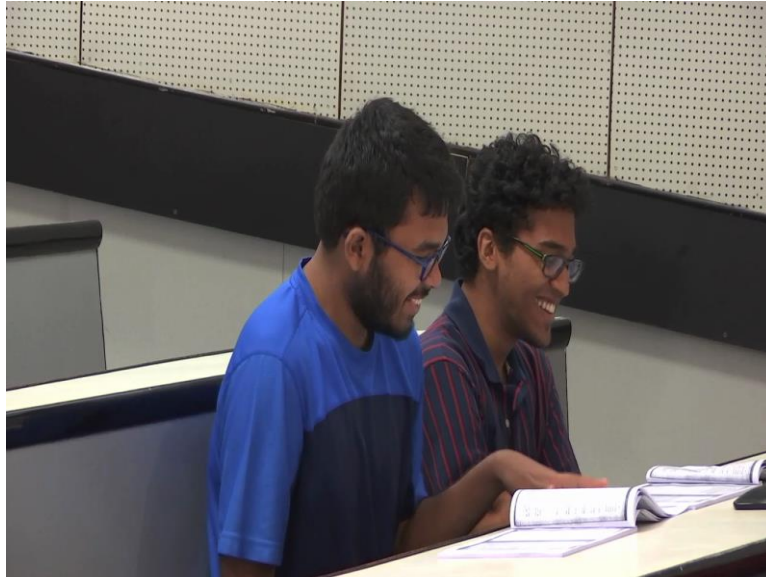
Professor: Martha and Lois?

Student: Martha

Professor: Martha

Student: Lois

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Professor: Do you think there is some kind of ambiguity about the lesbian angle here? Because very soon that this allegation that there is some kind of this so-called unnatural, yeah, relationship between these two women is existing but the idea doesn't come from the children. This is planted in their head, because some of them have eavesdropped. Ok and who actually broached this topic? Mrs.

Student: Mrs. Mortar

Professor: Mrs. Mortar, Ok, and what kind, I mean look at Lillian Hellman's richly drawn out characters. Mrs. Mortar is a frustrated actress. Ok, she always feels that she was destined for greater things, Shakespearean and actress from Ibsen and Shaw and that's what her destiny was. But absolutely nothing; she is on the charity of these two nice young women. But in

order to malign them, to tarnish their reputation she has to say something, but what about Karen's feelings for Martha?

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Student: Martha's feelings for Karen, it is not obvious but it's implied

Professor: Martha's feelings for Karen, yes

Student: But Karen doesn't seem like she is, she has any

Professor: And what kinds of feelings are those?

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Do you think that is unnatural about the way Martha feels about Karen? Yes?

Student: Well, unnatural, in the sense

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Student: I happened to have read the whole play before I came here, so.

Professor: You have read the play so yeah, in the light of the entire play

Student: I

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Professor: Do you feel that writer is giving us something here?

Student: I would like

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Student: to talk about Mrs. Mortar's character in fact, so in the next scene when Mrs. Tilford reacts as she does, I think Mrs. Mortar's character is important in the sense that she, she, the only thing she actually lashes out at Martha is she snobs her, she snobs her with these allegations but she is not taking violent action or asking her to like, she even says get a beau of your own. Get a woman of your own. But Mrs. Tilford reacts far more, I mean, it is a reaction far more disastrous for the characters as well, right. So I mean, despite Mrs. Mortar's character being prudent, her character seems quite intriguing because she doesn't even ask Martha to, you know, like to mend her ways.

Student: But I think Martha is known for a while about the nature of the relationship so

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Professor: Martha, don't you think there is an awareness in Martha at least

Student: Yeah

Professor: About how she feels about Karen

Student: Yes

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Student: Karen is very unsure of her

Professor: Yes

Student: And at least that is what we get.

Professor: Yes

Student: Karen is very unsure.

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Professor: May be Karen is still unsure at this point because there is Joe. But it's a fact that whenever Joe is around, Martha feels insecure and uncomfortable and then her violent kind of reaction

Student: Yeah

Professor: Why should you get married when we have struggled so hard? One way you can take it, two women who have struggled this long, they are already 28 and still in debt and trying to pay off the loans they have taken from various quarters and trying to establish this girls' school, a boarding school and then now that things are rolling for them, Martha feels marriage or a man would hamper things. But is it only that? Is it only career ambition that we are talking about? Not really. Because Mrs. Mortar later on, I mean the next line, she tells us that you were always like this, yeah. Whenever there would be a new girl around, there would be some kind of reaction from you. So the hint is there very clearly. Although the words wouldn't be spoken aloud, Ok, do you think Lillian Hellman has to some extent been able to capture child psychology somewhere? Why do you think so?

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Student: Because children are evil

Professor: Is it personal experience or

Student: Agreed, agreed, second him

Student: I will use that word evil. Children are evil.

Professor: Children are capable of extreme

Student: Cruelness and

Professor: Cruelty and violence, which is a fact.

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Professor: Children are capable of inflicting damaging scars on people, yeah. Sometimes the scars that we get while we are in childhood, they never heal. I mean, haven't we all felt that? Children are more capable of inflicting violence and damage than even grown-up people, because they say certain things without thinking. Adults could be more tactful, perhaps but not children. So do you think that *The Children's Hour*, does it have, because these things happen within an hour, the period of one hour; so do you think *The Children's Hour*, the title has some kind of relevance, significance here?

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Student: Towards the end, Martha, they talk about, when children lay down to sleep, and there is an hour before they fall to sleep, when everything seems fearsome

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Professor: Yes

Student: And I feel that I am stuck in that hour. So may be, that's what Children's Hour refers to.

Professor: Yes

Student: That period of suspension, when we just get stuck.

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Professor: Right, so, so much has happened within an hour. Ok, at the beginning when Mary is first introduced and this is the last topic of the day I want to talk about, when Mary first enters with wild bunch of flowers, do you think that has some kind of a significance? Wild flowers and she lies about it, perhaps that bunch of flowers has been given to one of these women, the two teachers and they tossed it in a garbage can, and she picks them and she

plays on, plays up with Mrs. Mortar's vanity. She knows exactly how to, yeah, play with people. So she knows everyone's weak spot. Have you noticed that?

Student: Lois

Professor: Yes, from the beginning, she knows that if she pulls this trick, then she will manage to get something out from that. So heart attack is the thing she tries to pull with her aunt now. So her aunt, or her grandmother, sorry, it is the rich Mrs. Tilford, the all powerful Mrs. Tilford and the plan is that now I am going to leave, run away from this place and go and complain to my aunt, my grandfather about the way she is being mistreated. Ok, so Mary is the child who is actually the engine that drives the plot here, yes.

Mary is the character. All other characters just sit back and let Mary do things to them, therefore the relevance of the title. Children have more important role to play than the adults and adults lose, it is the other way round. Very often you find and most often we find adults ruining children's lives but here it is the other way round. She completely changes the game for everyone. Alright so now next class on Thursday and we will continue with the second act.

(Professor – student conversation ends)