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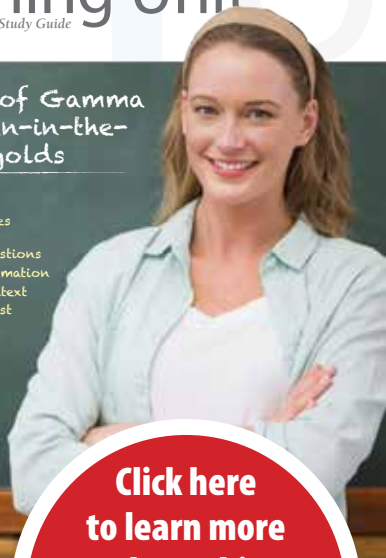
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds

by Paul Zindel

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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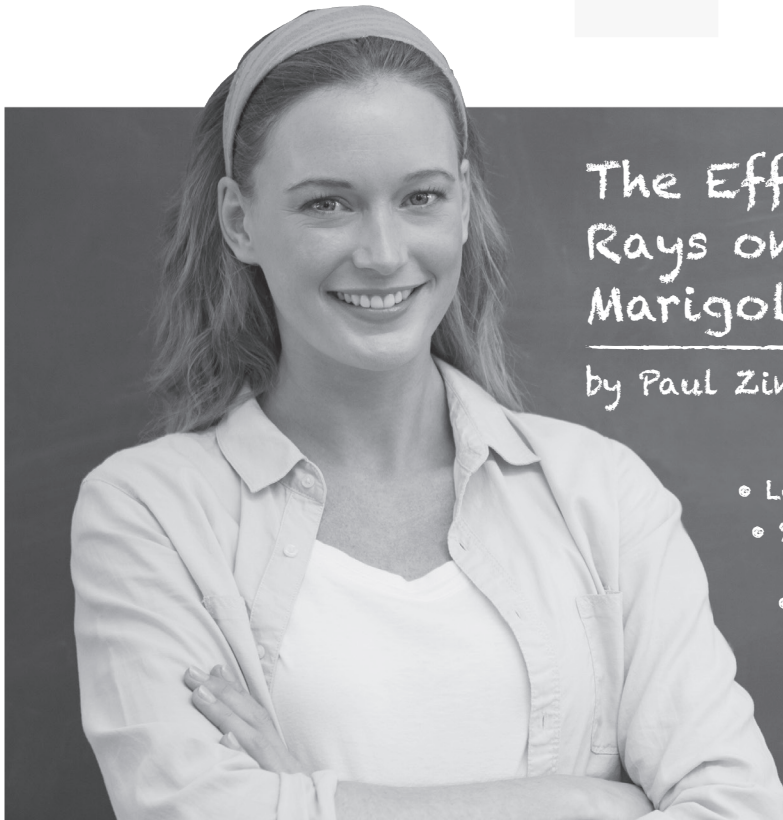
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The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds

Note to the Teacher

This autobiographical play won the 1971 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. It explores how a child from a dysfunctional family manages to overcome her poor environment to emerge as a successful, hopeful young girl. Although, Zindel wrote Tillie as a female character, the characters and incidents from the play are autobiographical.

All references come from the Bantam Books edition of *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds*, copyright 1997.

Biography of Paul Zindel

Paul Zindel was born in 1936 on Staten Island, New York. His father deserted the family when Paul was two years old, leaving him and his sister fatherless in a world where, unlike today, children from nontraditional families were teased and ridiculed.

Zindel's mother had an unusual childhood, making her an emotional cripple. She lived in a dream world and was never able to keep a job. Due to her mother's early death, her father paid families to take care of her. Zindel's grandfather earned his living selling vegetables from a wagon and spent the little he earned on luxuries for his daughter. Paul's sister suffered one convulsion as a child. She also owned a pet rabbit. When she reached puberty, her verbally abusive mother tried to teach her that men could not be trusted.

As a child, Zindel excelled in science. School and his teachers were his salvation from the turmoil of his home life. Paul graduated from Wagner College and taught high school chemistry for 10 years before becoming a published writer and winning the Pulitzer Prize in drama in 1971 for his play *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds*.

The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. understand the importance of stage directions to help the reader establish characterization, gain an impression or picture of the setting, and define sensory information including appropriate sound effects, lighting, mannerisms, and music.
2. cite incidents from the story which support the following themes:
 - young people need to view life with hope;
 - there is an order or pattern to the universe;
 - nature created people with innate ability to solve problems.
3. define vocabulary words from the story.
4. agree or disagree with the following generalizations by Beatrice:
 - some people are born to talk and others to listen;
 - money makes money;
 - nobody is too busy for anything they want to do;
 - if you are different, people try to get rid of you.
5. find examples of sarcasm and puns in the play.
6. discuss the irradiated marigolds as symbols of the impact a poor home environment has on Tillie, Ruth, and Beatrice.
7. point how the growth potential of the marigolds illustrates the following theme: a child can mature into a complete adult even if he or she comes from a dysfunctional family.
8. define “autobiographical” and discuss the extent to which this play is autobiographical.
9. write a character sketch of Beatrice, including her relationship with her daughters, her childhood, and whether or not she is a good mother; point out how her character changes by the end of the play.
10. comment on what the following items might represent in the play: radiation, paper on the windows, the atom, the flashlight, cigarette smoke, the cloud machine.
11. discuss why or why not the rabbit may be seen as a symbol of the shame the family feels.

The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. State whether or not you believe Beatrice is a good mother. Cite incidents from the play to support your answer.
2. Zindel often begins his plays with a true incident from his own life. What incident does he use to begin this play? List three other elements from this play that help to define it as an autobiographical play.
3. What is the significance of the paper on the windows?
4. Why does Beatrice kill the rabbit at the end of the play?
5. In what ways are the growth patterns of the irradiated marigolds similar to the kind of women Ruth and Tillie will one day become?
6. Define the following vocabulary words from the story: effeminate, hermaphrodite, saccharine, loon, thrombosis
7. Cite incidents from the story to prove or disprove the following statement: Tillie is hopeful for her future despite her terrible childhood.
8. One of Zindel's favorite themes is the idea that nature created humans in such a way that we have the ability to solve problems. List one problem each of the main characters manages to solve by the end of the play.
9. Comment on the significance of the atom to the story. What main theme is suggested by Tillie's voice-over when she marvels at the idea that the atoms in her hand may have once been part of a fern?
10. Beatrice states several generalizations about life in this play. Using experiences from your own life, do you agree or disagree with the following generalization: "If you're just a little bit different in this world, they try to kill you off."

ACT II

VOCABULARY

exasperate - to anger, to irritate.

pathetically - in a manner to cause pity, or sympathy

This section covers from the beginning of ACT II until the scene changes from Tillie’s home to the school assembly.

- 1. For what reasons does Miss Hanley refer to Beatrice as “Betty the Loon”?

- 2. What evidence is there that Ruth is or is not jealous of her sister’s success?

- 3. How does Ruth exasperate Beatrice? Why do you think Ruth seems to be obsessed with the dead cat?

- 4. Assume the rabbit in this story represents the shame this family feels because they do not measure up to the expectations of their neighbors and the teachers at the school. Why do you think Ruth takes the rabbit into her arms before she tells Beatrice that she took the bow out of Tillie’s hair because it made her look crazy?

- 5. Find an example of a generalization about life in Beatrice’s speech about the bow.
