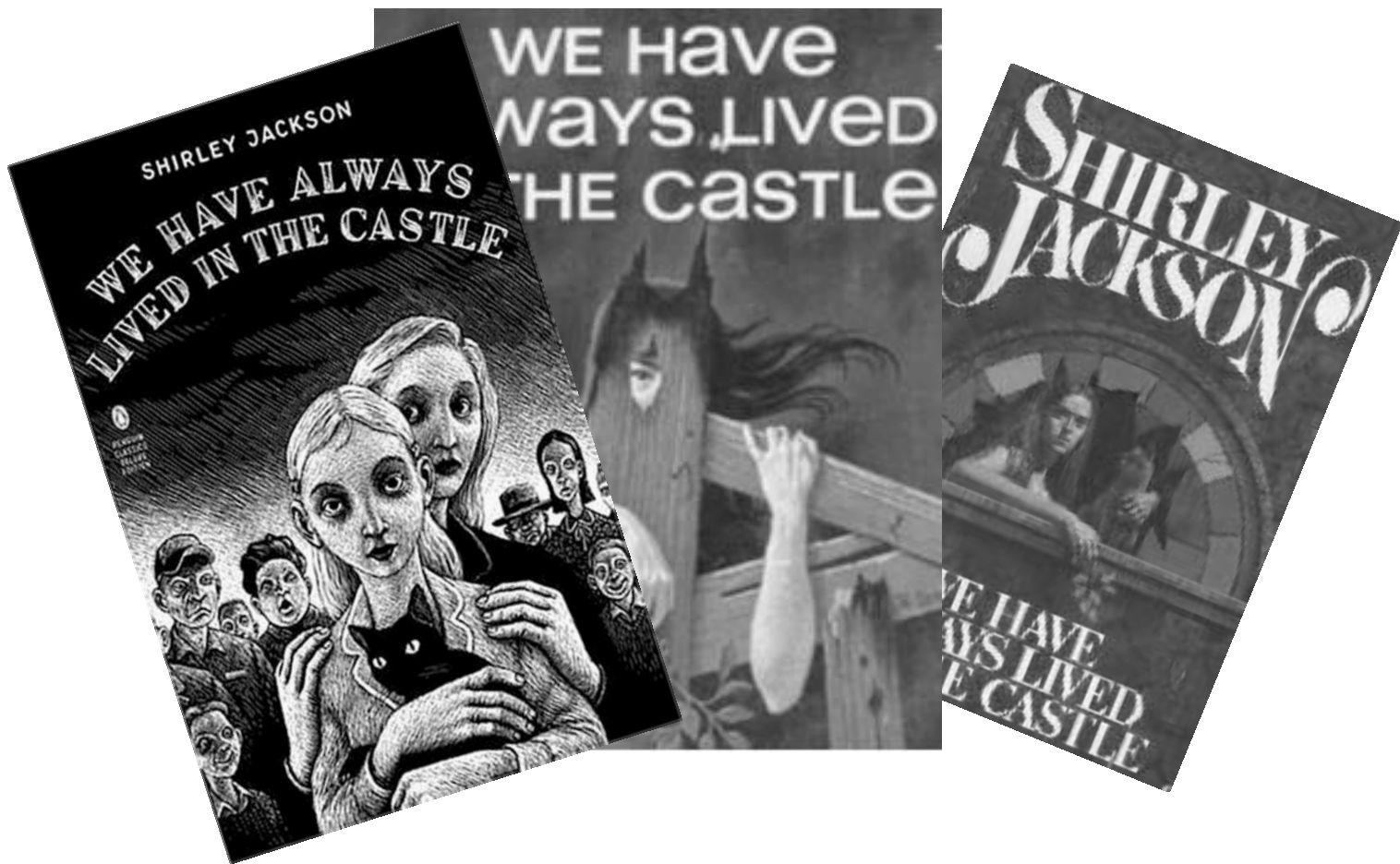


STUDY GUIDE

FOR



BY SHIRLEY JACKSON

Jackson complains of her frustration when a publisher who had asked her to contribute to a series of children's books presented her with a list of "suitable" words:

"Getting" and "spending" were on the list, but not "wishing"; "cost" and "buy" and "nickel" and "dime" were all on the list, but not "magic." ... I felt that the children for whom I was supposed to write were being robbed, persuaded to accept nickels and dimes instead of magic wishes.

Jackson must have had her way: The book she would write was called *9 Magic Wishes*.

SHIRLEY JACKSON (1916-1965)

Shirley Jackson was born in San Francisco on December 14, 1916, and spent her childhood in nearby Burlingame, California, where she began writing poetry and short stories as a young teenager. Her family moved east when she was seventeen, and she attended the University of Rochester. After a year, in 1936, she withdrew and spent a year at home practicing writing, producing a minimum of a thousand words a day.

She entered Syracuse University in 1937, where she published her first story, "Janice," and was soon appointed fiction editor of the campus humor magazine. After winning a poetry contest at Syracuse she met her future husband, young aspiring literary critic Stanley Edgar Hyman, and together they founded a literary magazine, *Spectre*, with Hyman as editor. Both graduated in 1940 and moved to New York's Greenwich Village, where Shirley wrote without fail every day while they both worked odd jobs. She began having her stories published in *The New Republic* and *The New Yorker*, and the first of their four children was born. In 1944 Jackson's story "Come Dance With Me in Ireland" was chosen for *Best American Short Stories*.

In 1945, Stanley Hyman was offered a teaching position at Bennington College, and they moved into an old house in North Bennington, Vermont, where Shirley continued her daily writing while raising children and running a household. Her first novel, *The Road Through The Wall*, was published in 1948. That same year *The New Yorker* published Jackson's iconic story, "The Lottery," which generated the largest volume of mail ever received by the magazine—before or since—almost all of it hateful. "The Lottery" has since been published in dozens of languages, and is still required reading in U.S. high schools. It is possibly the most well known short story of the 20th Century.

In 1949, the Hyman family moved to Westport, *Connecticut*, so Hyman could commute to his new job on *The New Yorker* staff, and Shirley's second book, *The Lottery, or The Adventures of James Harris* (a collection of short stories) was published. Their house was often filled with visiting poets, artists, composers and writers, and National Book Award-winning author Ralph Ellison spent months in residence with the Hymans while completing *Invisible Man*.

In 1951 Jackson's succession of Gothic novels began with the publication of *Hangsaman*, and her "The Summer People" was chosen for *Best American Short Stories*. That year the Hymans moved back to North Bennington, where they would remain for the rest of their lives.

In 1952, "The Lottery" had its first of several adaptations for television. Jackson continued to be a prolific writer of short stories for popular magazines, and in 1953 *Life Among The Savages*, the first of two humorous family chronicles, was published. "The Lottery" was adapted for stage. In the next few years Jackson published *The Bird's Nest*, to great acclaim, and *Witchcraft of Salem Village*, a non-fiction juvenile volume. "One Ordinary Day With Peanuts" was chosen in 1956 for *Best American Short Stories*, and also that year, the film version of *The Bird's Nest*, *Lizzie*, was released. During the late fifties Jackson published *Raising Demons*, the second family chronicle, *The Sundial*, and the one-act play "The Bad Children."

In 1959 came *The Haunting of Hill House*, her best-known novel, which has come to be generally regarded as the "quintessential haunted house tale." That novel has twice been adapted for feature films. In 1961 Jackson received the Edgar Allan Poe Award for "Louisa, Please," one of the few such awards she ever received during her lifetime. The following year her best-selling novel *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* was included in the year's "Ten Best Novels" by *Time Magazine*.

In 1963, director Robert Wise released *The Haunting*, the first film adaptation of Jackson's novel, to superb reviews. Jackson was invited to join the teaching staff at the famed Breadloaf Writers' Conference, and she continued to review children's books for the New York Herald Tribune. In 1965 Jackson was awarded the Arents Pioneer Medal for Outstanding Achievement from Syracuse University, but illness prevented her from attending. On August 8, at the age of 48, Shirley Jackson died unexpectedly of heart failure during her usual afternoon nap.

The following year, Stanley Edgar Hyman published the first of two posthumous anthologies, *The Magic of Shirley Jackson*, a collection of short stories and three previously published novels. This was followed in 1968 by *Come Along With Me*, the unfinished novel that Jackson was working on at the time of her death, along with sixteen short stories and three lectures. Years later, in 1997, two of Jackson's children edited *Just An Ordinary Day*, a collection of many of Jackson's previously unpublished or uncollected short stories, which received near-unanimous great praise.



We Have Always Lived in the Castle by Shirley Jackson

Chapter 1

1. Does Merricat describe herself as you would expect an adult to? In what ways does she or doesn't she?
2. What do the library books tell you about the story and its time frame?
3. What do you learn about the Blackwood family by reading Merricat's description of the objects in the house on p. 2?
4. What keeps the Blackwood house "steady against the world"?
5. What is the one thought Merricat cannot bear the villagers to have about her?
6. Why do the villagers apparently hate the Blackwoods?
7. What are some of the things Merricat wishes as she walks through the village?
8. What happens in the coffee shop? What people are involved?
9. With which other members of her family does Merricat live?
10. Describe the game Merricat plays as she does the shopping.

On the map below, label the following:

Stella's
the Library

the Black Rock
the Blackwood house

the Rochester House/Harler's,
Elbert's Grocery

Blackwood Road



Town Hall



Post Office



Main Street



General Store



Social class in *We have Always Lived in the Castle*

As you read the novel, put each of the following people and their characteristics in the correct categories— Villagers, Old Wealth/Blackwoods, or New Wealth.

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Harlers ➤ Carringtons ➤ Shepherds ➤ Jim Donell & wife ➤ Joe Dunham ➤ Mr. & Mrs. Elbert ➤ Stella ➤ Harris Boys ➤ Have big, new houses (“McMansions”) ➤ Send kids to private schools ➤ Definitely have cars ➤ Don’t live right in the Village | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Mail is delivered ➤ Live in dumpy houses or apartments over stores, etc. ➤ Dull, flat, gray ➤ Messy, don’t care ➤ Clarks ➤ Live on Hill Road, Old Mountain Road, and River Road ➤ Do business in the nearest city (haircuts, shopping) ➤ Don’t live right in the Village ➤ Stupid, illiterate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>May</i> have cars ➤ Very fancy OLD house with lots of valuables ➤ Value knowledge, reading, music, culture ➤ Have servants ➤ Have a lot of money—own some of the businesses ➤ Live on “Blackwood Road” and own a lot of land ➤ Kids go/went to local school |
|--|---|--|

Villagers

Old Wealth/Blackwoods

New Wealth

Chapter 2

1. What does Merricat say is most effective in keeping out trespassers?

What does this tell you she values? How does this contrast with the villagers?

2. What did Merricat's mother forbid others to do? Why?

What did Merricat used to do as a girl?

3. What do we learn about Constance on p. 27? What does she say to Merricat that "chills" her?

4. How does Merricat describe Constance? How does she feel about her?

5. Who is Jonas?

6. What really odd thing does Merricat tell us about herself on p. 29?

7. Who are Mrs. Clarke and Mrs. Wright, and how does each behave in this chapter?

8. About what is Uncle Julian writing a book?

9. Describe what happened six years ago to the Blackwoods.

Chapters 3-4

1. According to Merricat, what indications are there that a change is coming?

2. Describe the pattern of Merricat's week.

3. What does Merricat do to try to prevent a change from coming?

4. What does Uncle Julian talk about most of the time?

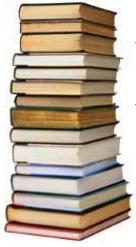
5. From what Julian says, how would you describe the Blackwood family's relationships before the deaths?

6. Who arrives at the end of Ch. 4 and how does Merricat feel about this?

The Importance of Imagery in Chapters 1-3

Directions: For each of the graphics below, identify the important person, place, happening and/or theme as seen in the first three chapters. Explain why you identified it as such, why it is significant, etc.

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



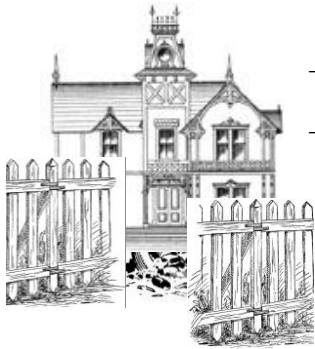
7.



8.



9.

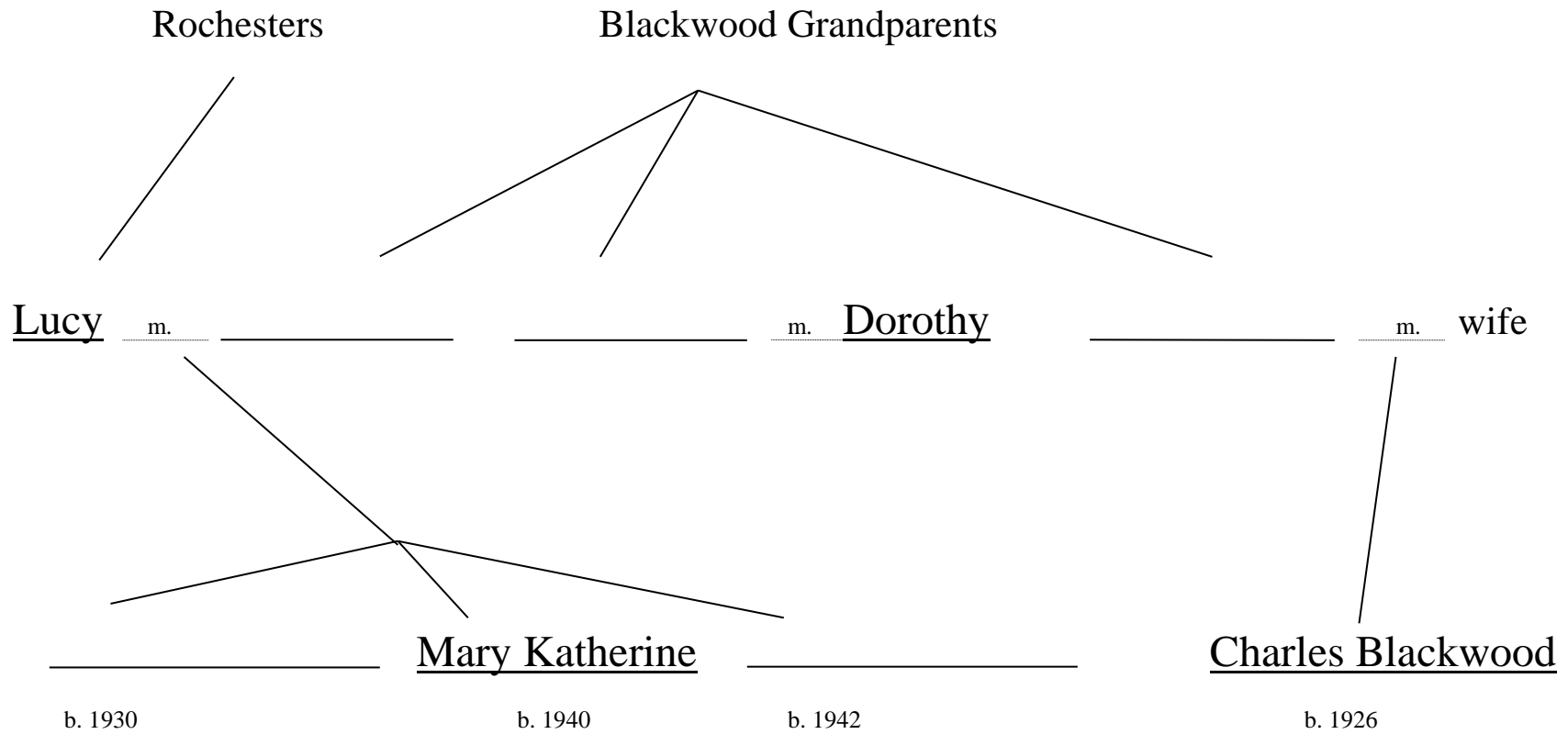


10.



The Blackwood Family Tree

Directions: Using the information given to you in the novel, primarily in chapter 3 and 4, fill in the blanks in the family tree below. (Note: m. with a dotted line means these two people married each other, and a line descending from them means the person at the end of that line is their child.) Brothers and sisters are listed next to each other, interrupted only by spouses (if any).



Chapter 5

1. What does Merricat at first try to pretend about Cousin Charles?

What does she first try to do to make him go away?

2. What does Constance tell Merricat about Charles' background?

3. What does Charles tell Julian about Arthur on p. 91? What, then, might be Charles' real reason for coming?

4. How does Charles feel about Julian's book?

5. How does Merricat behave towards Charles?

6. Where is Charles staying in the house?

7. What does Charles say on p. 101, and what does this tell us about him?

8. What does Merricat resolve to do on p. 102?

9. What major alteration in Merricat's life does Charles make?

What is Merricat's response on p. 104?

Chapter 6

1. Throughout this chapter, what does Charles seem most concerned about, get most angry about, etc.?

2. When he goes to the village, what does Charles forget, and what is the symbolic significance of this?

3. What things does Merricat do in this chapter to try to get rid of Charles and/or try to make their home safe from him?

What is his response to the first two things?

4. What threat does Charles make to Merricat on p. 113?

5. With what ideas has Charles been filling Constance's head (pp. 114-115 & 118-122)?

6. What is Charles' response when Merricat asks him to go away?

7. What does Uncle Julian think of Charles?

8. What does Constance almost say on p. 122?

Chapters 7-10

1. What does Merricat do on Thursday? Why?

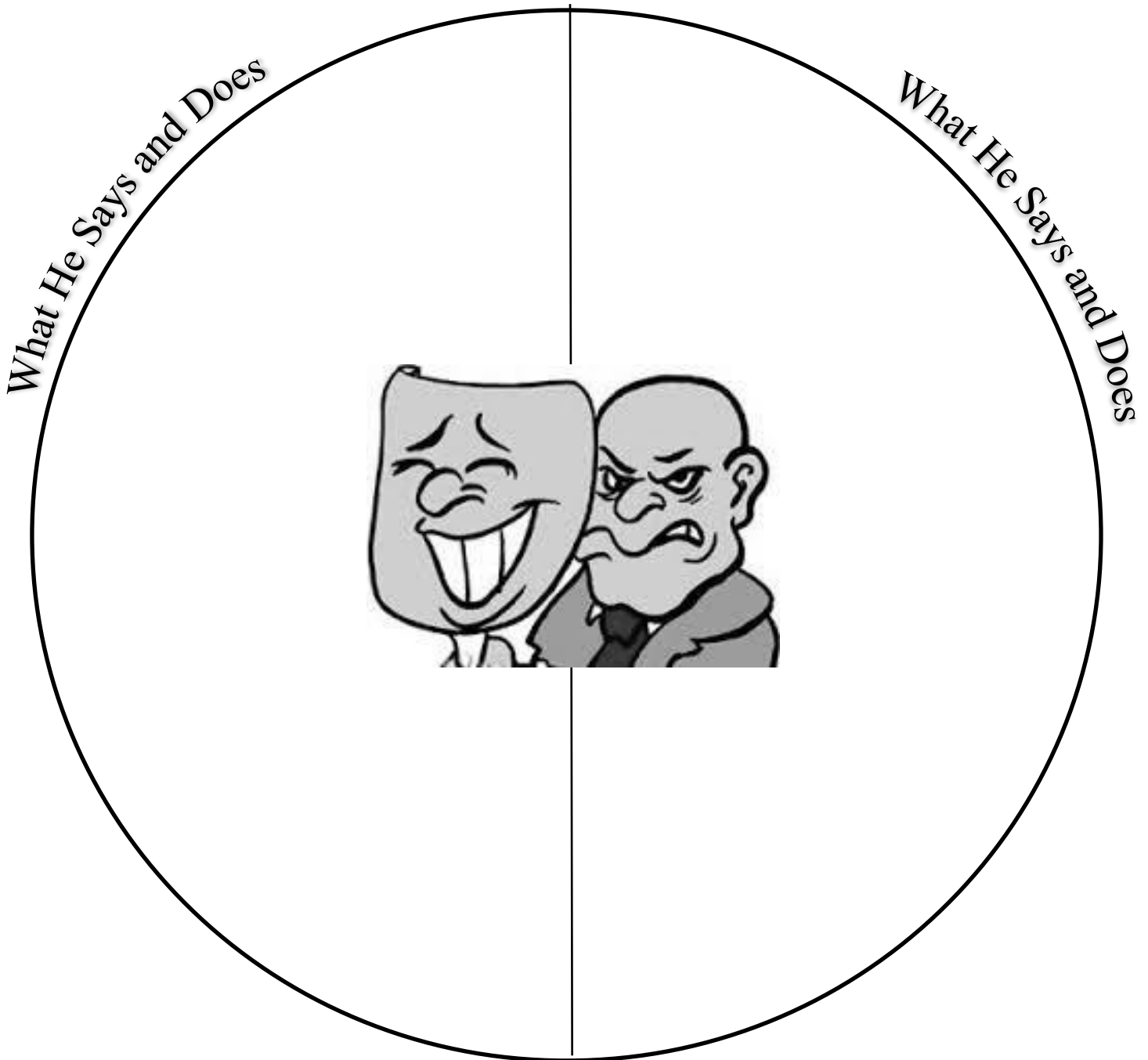
2. What does Charles find at the creek and how does he respond?

3. When Charles threatens to punish Merricat and she says, "You mean send me to bed without my dinner," to what is she referring?

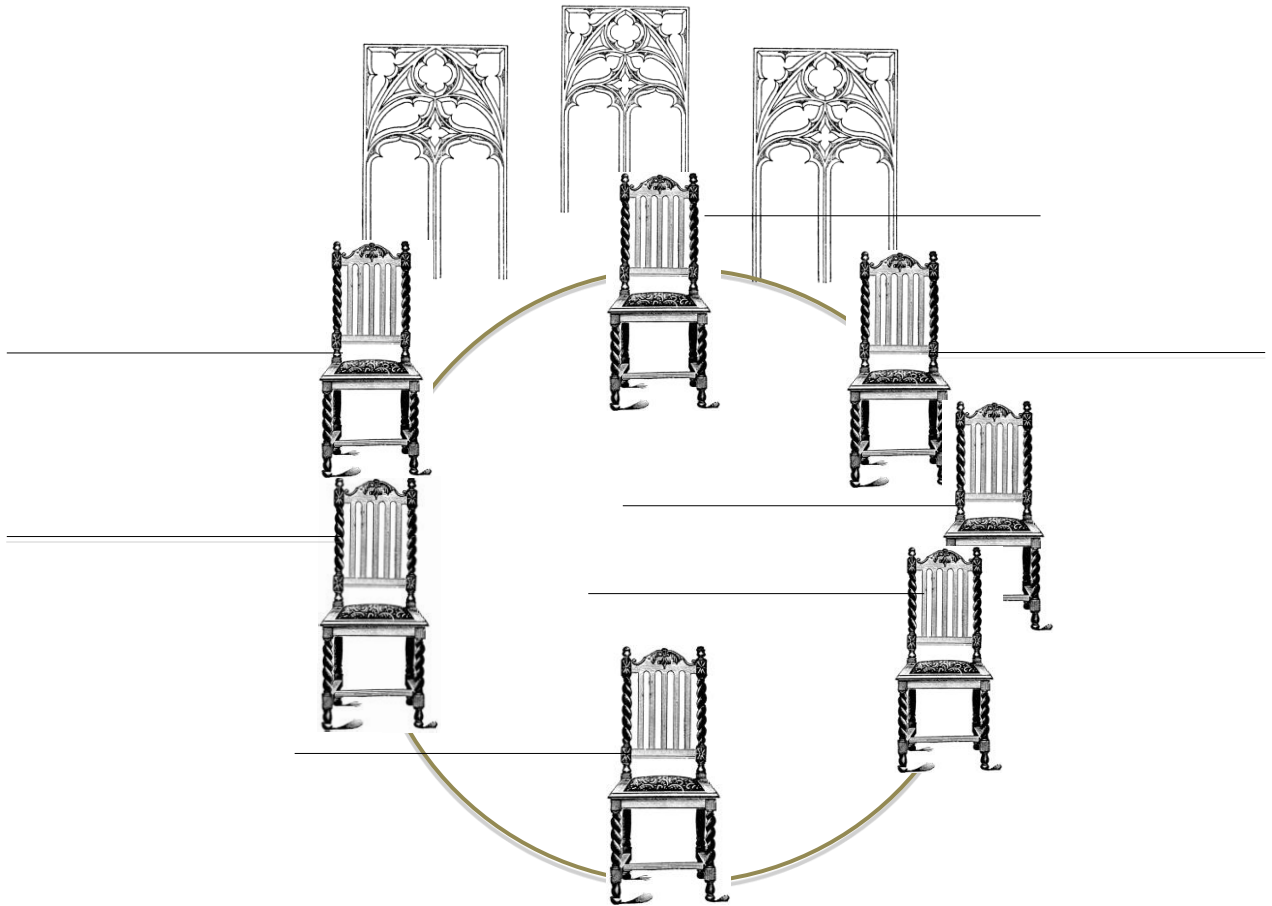
4. What happens at the summerhouse?

Cousin Charles Character Analysis

Use this organizer to analyze the character Cousin Charles. On the left side, note the things that he does and says to make him seem “not a bad man,” as Constance believes. On the right side, note the things that he says or does which show his true self, as seen through Merricat’s eyes.



Place the Blackwood family in their correct places around the dinner table (more information may also be found in Chapter 2):



5. How does the fire start?

6. What is Charles worried about during the fire?

7. One person points out Merricat and Constance to the rest of the villagers. Who does Merricat think it is?

8. What do the villagers do right after the fire is put out?

Who throws the first rock?

Who stops them?

9. What revelation is made at the end of chapter 8?

10. Why does Merricat think Julian died?

11. What are the new rules Merricat has for herself after the fire?

12. What do Constance and Merricat do after the fire to make a new life for themselves?

13. Who are the first people to come visit?

14. What argument does Dr. Levy use to try to persuade Merricat and Constance to see him?

15. What are the new patterns which Merricat and Constance finally establish?

We Have Always Lived in the Castle: The Film

Directions:

Imagine that you are writing a screenplay based on Shirley Jackson's novel *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. Your job is to suggest scenes from the novel to put into a film. Use the space below to list scenes and settings in the novel, their locations in the book and the characters involved, to be included in the film. **Use scenes from at least three of the ten chapters and four-five scenes total.**

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Scene/Setting/Action</i>	<i>Characters involved</i>

From a review of *Monstrous Acts and Little Murders*
by Jonathan Lethem
Salon Magazine

There's "The Lottery," of course, the story everyone knows even if they don't remember Shirley Jackson's name. A small New England town, blandly familiar in every way, sleepwalking its way through ritual murder. Likely the most controversial piece of fiction ever published in the *New Yorker*, resulting in hundreds of canceled subscriptions, later adapted for television, radio and ballet, it now resides in the popular imagination as an archetype. It can be as difficult to persuade readers that the story is just one sheaf in the portfolio of one of this century's most luminous and strange American writers as it is to explain that the town portrayed in "The Lottery" is a real one.

I know it is, because I lived there. North Bennington is a tiny village less than a mile from the otherwise isolated Bennington campus in Vermont. Shirley Jackson was married to Stanley Edgar Hyman, a literary critic who taught at the college. And she spent her life in the town, raising four children, presiding over a chaotic household that was host to Ralph Ellison, Bernard Malamud and Howard Nemerov, and at times going quietly crazy — and writing, always, with the rigor of one who has found her born task. Six novels, two bestselling volumes of deceptively sunny family memoirs and countless stories before her death at 48, in 1965.

The town hasn't changed, or at least it hadn't by the mid-eighties, when I was a student at the school. A handful of the townspeople portrayed in thin disguise in Jackson's novels and stories were still around. I knew the square where "The Lottery" takes place. It was Jackson's fate, as a faculty wife and an eccentric newcomer in a staid, insular village, to absorb the reflexive anti-Semitism and anti-intellectualism felt by the townspeople toward the college. She and her children were accessible in a way that her husband and his colleagues and students, who spent their days on the campus, were not.

Jackson was in many senses already two people when she arrived in Vermont. One was a turgid, fearful ugly-duckling, permanently cowed by the severity of her upbringing by a suburban mother obsessed with appearances. This half of Jackson was a character she brought brilliantly to life in her stories and novels from the beginning: the shy girl, whose identity slips all too easily from its foundations. The other half of Jackson was the expulsive iconoclast, brought out of her shell by marriage to Hyman — himself a garrulous egoist very much in the tradition of Jewish '50's New York intellectuals — and by the visceral shock of mothering a quartet of noisy, demanding babies. This second Shirley Jackson dedicated herself to rejecting her mother's sense of propriety, drank and smoked and fed to buttery excess — directly to blame for her and her husband's early deaths — dabbled in magic and voodoo, and interfered loudly when she thought the provincial Vermont schools were doing an injustice to her talented children. This was the Shirley Jackson that the town feared, resented and, depending on whose version you believe, occasionally persecuted.

The hostility of the villagers further shaped her psyche, and her art; the process eventually redoubled so the latter fed the former. After the enormous success of "The Lottery," a legend arose in town, almost certainly false, that Jackson had been pelted with stones by schoolchildren one day, then gone home and written the story. The real crisis came near the end of her life, resulting in a period of agoraphobia and psychosis; she wrote her way through it in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*. In that novel, Jackson brilliantly isolates the two aspects in her psyche into two odd, damaged sisters: one hypersensitive and afraid, unable to leave the house, the other a sort of squalid demon prankster who may or may not have murdered the rest of her family for her fragile sister's sake. For me, it is that unique and dreamlike book, rather than "The Lottery," that stands as her masterpiece. ...

To put it most simply, Shirley Jackson wrote about the mundane evils hidden in everyday life and about the warring and subsuming of selves in a family, a community and sometimes even in a single mind. She wrote about prejudice, neurosis and identity. An unfortunate impression persists (one Jackson encouraged, for complicated reasons) that her work is full of ghosts and witches. In truth, few of her greatest stories and just one of her novels, "The Haunting of Hill House," contain a suggestion of genuinely supernatural events. Jackson's forté was psychology and society, people in other words — people disturbed, dispossessed, misunderstanding or thwarting one another compulsively, people colluding absently in monstrous acts. She had a jeweler's eye for the microscopic degrees by which a personality creeps into madness or a relationship turns from dependence to exploitation. Judy Oppenheimer's fine 1988 biography of Jackson is called "Private Demons," but it could have been called "Little Murders."

She's also terribly funny. Her observations are dry, her dialogue shockingly fresh and absurd...

From a review of *Monstrous Acts and Little Murders*
by Jonathan Lethem

1. What are “[a] anti-Semitism and [b] anti-intellectualism”?

Where and why did Jackson experience them?

2. Where does anti-intellectualism have its roots in American society? Think back over the history of America and her literature.

Where else have we seen it in American society as portrayed through literature?

3. Evaluate Lethem’s description of *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*: "two odd, damaged sisters: one hypersensitive and afraid, unable to leave the house, the other a sort of squalid demon prankster who may or may not have murdered the rest of her family for her fragile sister’s sake." How accurate was he, do you agree with his assessment, is this how you’d sum up the book, etc.?