

## Launchpad: “A Jury of Her Peers”

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Introduction

In 1915, she was introduced to and fell in love with George Cram Cook, a wealthy, young rebel from Davenport. He came from a well-to-do background, but he was a philosophical radical, a leftist, and a sometime professor of philosophy at the University of Iowa and at Stanford University. Glaspell and Cook eventually moved to the East Coast where they married and fell in with a set of avant-garde intellectuals. In 1915, they founded the [Provincetown Players](#), a theater company located on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, which would have an important role in the history of the American theater. The company helped to launch the career of Eugene O’Neill, among others, who went onto greater renown.

Glaspell also wrote plays for the Provincetown Players and became one of its most important actresses. Her 1931 play *Alison’s House*, based loosely on the life of Emily Dickinson, won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. In her later years, in the 1940s, she returned to her Midwestern roots, living in Chicago and back in Davenport, but toward the end of that decade returned to Provincetown where she died in 1948.

Although she was widely regarded during her lifetime, Glaspell is little read or performed today, with one major exception: “[A Jury of Her Peers](#)” (1917). It was adapted from her one-act play, “[Trifles](#),” written and produced in Provincetown a year earlier. Set in the rural Midwest, it was inspired by an actual murder that took place in Iowa in 1900, and which Glaspell had covered for the *Des Moines Daily News*.

The short story was an immediate hit. It was anthologized in that year and in many, many years throughout her lifetime. It was rediscovered in the 1970s by the feminist movement, and has become a staple of women’s studies courses in colleges and universities in recent decades. In 1980, it was made into a [movie](#) and nominated for an Academy Award for Best Dramatic Live-Action Short.

### Summary

A farmer, John Wright, had been found—by a visiting neighbor, Mr. Hale—strangled to death by a rope in his bed. His wife, Minnie (née Minnie Foster), has been arrested, jailed, and accused of the murder. The story takes place the next day, when Sheriff Peters and the county attorney (Mr. Henderson), accompanied by Mr. Hale, visit the Wright house, seeking evidence that might convict the accused. Martha Hale, Mr. Hale’s wife, is summoned by Sheriff Peters to accompany his own wife as she gathers some things from the house to bring to Mrs. Wright in jail. The two women, formerly unfamiliar to each other, spend their time downstairs, looking through “kitchen things” and the like—dismissed by the men as mere “trifles”—while the “real” investigators search the bedroom upstairs and the outside barn. The men come up empty. The women do not. More penetrating in their vision, they piece together the sort of married life Mrs. Wright had lived. And, following up on a series of clues—including unfinished work in the kitchen, some crooked stitching on the quilt she had been sewing, a broken door hinge on an empty bird cage, and, finally, the corpse of a strangled canary—they also reconstruct Minnie Wright’s motive. In silent collusion, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters choose not to disclose the clues that reveal the motive, thereby constituting themselves as a jury and tacitly acquitting Minnie of any wrongdoing.