

study guide "The Cover of Life" by R. T. Robertson

BACKGROUND

For centuries the major cultures of our world have stubbornly held to a position of male domination... For decades in this country's culture a woman's place was in the kitchen, often barefoot and pregnant. She was totally subservient to "her man." This attitude was often reinforced by religion and government.

I can remember that both of my grandmothers were bound to their homes. Neither could drive a car. That was a man's job. It was the man's job to earn the "bread" for the family. One of my grandmothers was a teacher. Back in the day, it was acceptable for a woman to teach IF she was single. But when she got married she had to give up her job so that a "man who needed to provide for his family" could have a job.



The Nineteenth Amendment, which prohibited state or federal sex-based restrictions on voting was passed by congress on June 4, 1919, and ratified by sufficient states in 1920. The three older women in this show would have been among the first women to vote under this law.

The advent of World War II changed the equation. So many of the men were away fighting the war that many women were drafted to keep the factories running. Society suddenly learned that women could hold their own in the workforce. Witness the pride of Rosie the Riveter. Women realized they could make a living on their own - without being dependent on a man. The result was many new-found freedoms for women.



That is the background for the characters you will meet in "The Cover of Life."

CHARACTERS

Among the characters we see two different generations of women.

Three women aged 19-25; at the start of their adult lives:

 Tood, Weetsie and Sybil.

Three women twenty or so years older:

 Kate, Aunt Ola and Addie Mae.

As you watch our show try to decide how each of these women is handling or has handled male domination.

Younger generation:

 One character has totally bought into the barefoot and pregnant concept;

 One character is trying to use her sexuality to control her man.

 One character wants equal status with her husband.

Older generation:

 One character totally dominates her man.

 One tries to be "one of the boys;"

 One has sacrificed everything for her husband and her family.

As you watch the play, identify which woman fits which description above.

CHARACTERS con't.

It is interesting that the males are the "bad guys" or the antagonists of the show and yet only one male character appears. This speaks to the power of the male even when "He" isn't around. The one man we do meet is a man who could choose to break the pattern if he only has the courage. Which choice will he make? Will he even have a choice?

SETTING - place

The opening of the script says, "The Cliffert house is represented by a minimal set, abstract and fluid..." In my research I found another comment from the author that the play should be "like memories floating in the darkness." We are taking advantage of our black box using a black floor and walls to create the "darkness and the barest of furniture to represent the home. The "walls of the house" are fluid in the sense that the cast sometimes moves through them.

SETTING - time

Most of the play is a flash back to the memories of Kate of her visit to the Cliffert house in Sept. 1943. Because it is memory the sense of time is a bit distorted and we do not get a clear picture of exactly how long Kate stayed with the Cliffert gals.

The one thing that IS clear is that her visit changes all of their lives in some way. She is the catalyst. See if you can discover how each of the characters is changed by the events of the show.

STYLE:

We were excited to learn that the play's plot is based on the real life events of the author's mother. R.T. Robertson's mother was really named Tood and his aunts were Weetsie and Sybil. His grandmother was Ola. The events of the play are basically real.

Knowing this spurred us to produce this show in the style of **selected realism**. Some things are as real as we can make them while others are left to your imagination. We found and studied all the towns and places named in the script. Because you are so close to the stage we did the research and recreated the Sears catalog and the magazines that are mentioned in the script. Even the bird calls used as sound effects in one scene are birds native to northern Louisiana.

FYI LIFE MAGAZINE

One final note: "The [Harry] Luce *Life* was the first all-photographic American news magazine, and it dominated the market for more than 40 years. The magazine sold more than 13.5 million copies a week at one point and was so popular that President Harry S. Truman, Sir Winston Churchill and General Douglas MacArthur all serialized their memoirs in its pages." - Wikipedia

Our recreation of the cover shot using our actresses . . .

Our THANKS to the Nord Family Foundation for making your tickets and this program possible!

