

# “One of the Girls in Our Party” Lesson Plan for Teachers 2021

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## **Overview:**

This lesson plan will provide teachers with additional information about Thomas Wolfe, methods of analysis for his short story “One of the Girls in Our Party,” and additional information about the story’s historical context and theme. This information will provide material for discussion of the text as a companion to the “Telling Our Tales” 2021 Student Writing Competition.

## **Objectives:**

1. Students will create a work of fiction based on their own personal experiences or the experiences of someone they know.
2. Students will be able to explain how Thomas Wolfe's writing was based on his experiences.
3. Students will be able to identify major themes in the story “One of the Girls in Our Party” and connect those themes to ideas from their own lives.

Suitable for classes in grades 4-12.

## **NC ELA Writing Standards**

Grades 4-5: W.4.3/5.3- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

Grades 6-8: W.6.3/7.3/8.3- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

Grades 9-12: W.9.3/10.3/11.3/12.3- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

## **NC ELA Reading Standards**

Grades 4-5:

RL.4.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.

RL.4.3 Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text.

RL.4.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including words that affect meaning and tone.

RL.4.6 Compare and contrast the point of view from which different stories are narrated, including the difference between first- and third-person narrations.

RL.5.2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

RL.5.3 Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text.

RL.5.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, recognizing specific word choices that contribute to meaning and tone.

RL.5.5 Explain how chapters, scenes, or stanzas provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.

RL.5.6 Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.

#### Grade 6:

RL.6.2 Determine a theme of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

RL.6.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

RL.6.5 Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.

RL.6.6 Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

#### Grades 7-8:

RL.7.2 Determine a theme of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

RL.7.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text; analyze the impact of rhymes and repetitions of sounds on meaning and tone in a specific line or section of a literary work.

RL.7.6 Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the perspectives of different characters in a text.

RL.8.2 Determine a theme of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

RL.8.3 Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

RL.8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

RL.8.6 Analyze how differences in the perspectives of the characters and the audience or reader create such effects as suspense or humor.

Grades 9-10:

RL.9-10.2 Determine a theme of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

RL.9-10.3 Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

RL.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.

RL.9-10.9 Analyze how an author adopts or adapts source material in a specific work.

Grades 11-12:

RI.11-12.2 Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

RI.11-12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

RI.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text.

RI.11-12.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, and/or persuasiveness of the text.

**NC ELA Language Standards**

L.4.4 – L.12.4 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on (grade appropriate) reading content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies: context clues, word parts, word relationships, and reference materials.

**NC ELA Speaking and Listening Standards**

SL.4.1 – SL.12.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on (grade appropriate) topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

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## Historical Context & Story Analysis for Teacher Reference

### Context on Thomas Wolfe:

Thomas Wolfe is still considered by many to be North Carolina's most famous author. He was born on October 3, 1900 in Asheville, NC. His 1929 novel, *Look Homeward, Angel*, was largely based on his childhood growing up in his mother's boardinghouse. As a writer, Wolfe's novels and many of his short stories were often rooted in autobiography and drew upon his personal experiences.

Wolfe traveled extensively as an adult, especially to Europe. He carried notebooks with him and recorded interesting conversations or noted when inspiration struck while traveling. In total, Wolfe made seven trips abroad, with his first trip in 1924, and his last in 1936. Over the years and through his trips, he visited England, France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, Hungary, and Holland.

He did not manage money wisely. In between writing books, he would often use notes from his notebooks to create short stories for magazine publication. These smaller paychecks helped him make ends meet. One example of such a story is "One of the Girls in Our Party," which was published in Scribner's magazine in January of 1935. It appeared again later in 1935 in *From Death to Morning*, an early collection of Wolfe's short stories.

Refer to pages under the "History" tab of our webpage at [www.wolfememorial.com](http://www.wolfememorial.com) for more information about Thomas Wolfe, his family, his work, and the history of Asheville.

### Plot and themes:

Unlike many of his works, Wolfe's short story, "One of the Girls in Our Party," is less rooted in autobiography, however, it does appear to draw from some of his own travels and places he visited abroad. In perhaps the only published instance where Wolfe is narrating from a female perspective, this short story focuses on a tour group traveling through Europe, consisting of "thirty women, all of them teachers from the public schools of the American middle west...." The story is told partly in first person, from the perspective of a Miss Blake, through a letter she is writing home about her travels and the places the group has visited. As she documents their journey, she mentions several other tour companions by name, and pays particular attention to their time in Holland, and of Mr. Vogelsang, a favorite tour guide there.

In one of Wolfe's pocket notebooks, he recalls his own visit to Holland in 1931 and an interaction with a waiter, where he attempted to write the Dutch waiter's accented English as it sounded to him. In many of his stories, Wolfe often wrote dialogue for characters to reflect a particular dialect or accent. Within "One of the Girls in Our Party," is dialogue from the Dutch tour guide, Mr. Vogelsang, written to emphasize his broken English. These bits of text might be better understood when read alongside the audio recording found in the Prezi presentation linked in the Procedures section below, or read

aloud by students. Today, it is important to note that when writing in a dialect, it can be easy to cross a line into caricature, most notably if a character is part of a different culture. Here, Wolfe's inclusion of Mr. Vogelsang's accent was meant to convey how likeable and humorous he is as a tour guide to foreign visitors in his homeland of Holland, rather than as a rude or derogatory comment on a different culture.

### **Characters, Setting, and an Outline of the Trip through Europe:**

- *The Narrator*: an unknown voice provides context within the story.
- *Miss Blake*: much of the story is told from her perspective as she recounts her trip in a letter.
- *Mr. Vogelsang*: a humorous tour guide in Holland.
- *Miss Turner*: a fellow traveler with Miss Blake's group; she and Miss Blake have a brief conversation in the beginning.
- Other mentioned but minor characters include, Miss Cramer, who almost got hit by a bus; Miss Jordan, who sprained her ankle; Miss Barrett, who teaches English Lit and loves Shakespeare; Miss Bradley, who is upset about missing luggage; Miss Powers, a disagreeable woman that others find annoying; Miss Webster; and Miss Watson.

The story opens with the tour group lunching at a little Swiss Hotel, one of the stops on their trip through Europe. Here, Miss Blake sits down to write a letter home and, in the process, gives a synopsis of their trip through Europe so far and where they are heading next. As the letter outlines, the girls took a ship from America and arrived in England, where they visited London first. From there, the group travelled on to Oxford and Stratford-on-Avon, then Amsterdam, the Island of Marken, The Hague, and Haarlem in Holland, followed by Paris and Montmartre in France, and then on to their current location in Montreux, Switzerland. Throughout, Miss Blake highlights various attractions and things that happened to some of the girls in their party.

At this point, Miss Blake notes that the tour is splitting up, with some of the party heading on to take a trip along the Rhine to Munich, Salzburg, and the Bavarian Alps, while the rest will go on to see more of Switzerland as well as Milan, Venice, Florence, and Rome in Italy, and the Austrian Tyrol before joining back up with the other group in Vienna, Austria.

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### **Procedures**

**\*These may be changed for the needs of the class. We know many of your lessons may be taught digitally and online, therefore we developed this lesson plan to be as adaptable as possible. Any classroom handouts referenced below are made fully**

available to teachers and students as pdfs, via our website

<http://wolfememorial.com/for-teachers/student-writing-contest/>.

**Preparation:**

1. Pull up, or have the students pull up the slide program on Prezi of “One of the Girls in Our Party” by Thomas Wolfe. This will support the activities described below.  
<https://prezi.com/view/jNTTxece5UY722RXDqa5/> [Firefox and Internet Explorer *not* recommended for Prezi]
  - The presentation highlights pictures of Thomas Wolfe at various ages, the Wolfe family, pictures of Wolfe from his travels in Europe, a map of Europe and imagery to support the different locations mentioned in “One of the Girls in Our Party,” as well as audio recordings to accompany portions of dialogue from the short story text. Additional information about writing with accents and dialects can be found here: [How to Effectively Use Dialect in Fiction Writing \(servicescape.com\)](http://servicescape.com)
2. Print and pass out (or have students download and pull up) the following documents from the Wolfe Memorial Website: <http://wolfememorial.com/for-teachers/student-writing-contest/>
  - Thomas Wolfe’s short story “One of the Girls in Our Party”
  - One of the Girls in Our Party Vocabulary
  - Ideas for Student Consideration 2021
  - Writing Competition Guidelines and Instructions 2021
  - Submission Form 2021

**Step 1: Using the Prezi, introduce Thomas Wolfe and family, his travels, and his writings. Have students take notes to help them better understand “One of the Girls in Our Party.”**

- A. Refer to the photographs of Thomas Wolfe (there are three at different ages of his life) and ask who within the class knows about him and what he did. Explain that he was an author from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century who was born and raised in Asheville and heavily based his writings on his own life experiences.
- B. Display Wolfe family photos and describe that he was raised by his mother Julia Wolfe, a businesswoman who was eager to make money for the family.
- C. Go over highlights of Wolfe’s education and how he traveled extensively as an adult, keeping notebooks over the years as he jotted down thoughts and ideas. Mention that because he often ran short on money between books, he used smaller pieces of writing and his collected to notes to create short stories for magazines.

- D. To set up “One of the Girls in Our Party,” refer to the travel timeline and map to better understand the places mentioned in the story and spend time learning briefly about Holland with information on Dutch clock towers.

**Optional Extension:** Refer to pages under the “History” tab of our webpage at [www.wolfememorial.com](http://www.wolfememorial.com) for more specific information about Thomas Wolfe, his family, his work, and the history of Asheville.

### **Step 2: Activity/Discussion**

Asks students to reflect on the different types of accents and dialects they might be familiar with (you can refer to this portion of the Prezi). Do students think they might speak with a dialect? Have them consider how they might sound to someone from a different place or a foreign country. Using a phonetical style, or by explaining how to write words as they sound when spoken, have students write a short paragraph about themselves, based on how they think they sound to someone else. Allow students to read out-loud their answers (if willing) or have them share how they wrote certain words to convey a certain sound.

**Step 3: Have students pull out “One of the Girls in Our Party” and the accompanying Vocabulary list and allow students to read through the story.**

### **Step 4: Story Discussion.**

Go over the story with students. Refer to the “Historical Context & Story Analysis for Teacher Reference” section at the beginning of this lesson plan for support. Remind students that because Thomas Wolfe often used his own experiences in his writing, students can look back at their notes on Thomas Wolfe’s life to help draw these connections. Ask students what parallels they noticed between the short story and Wolfe’s own experiences and have them write their thoughts/answers. If in the classroom, you may write their thoughts on the board for reference as well, or if teaching remotely have students also take individual notes on other answers. Summarize the story by considering the setting, plot, characters, and theme.

### **Step 5: Assignment.**

Pass out or have students pull up the “Writing Competition Guidelines and Instructions 2021” and “Ideas for Student Consideration 2021.” Go over the writing assignment before wrapping up the lesson. Using “One of the Girls in Our Party” as an example, have students write a short story based on one (or more) of the prompts they were given (included in “Ideas for Student Consideration 2021”) and by following the guidelines listed on the “Writing Competition Guidelines and Instructions 2021” page. Please let students know they **must also fill out, sign, and submit the “Submission Form 2021” with their**

**stories for any work to be considered** (submission information found in the “Writing Competition Guidelines and Instructions 2021.”