

# Wit Play Script

## SCRIPT

*The stable scene is set towards the back of the stage, with at least two hay bales at one side, surrounded by brushes, shovels, buckets and any other stable equipment you can find, and the manger on the other. Loose hay should be scattered over the stable floor.*

**NARRATOR** Many years ago, there lived a young stable boy called Sam. He worked cleaning the stables in the town of Bethlehem.

*Enter Sam, sweeping the floor and looking sad.*

**THE SHREW** *(Popping up from behind a hay bale)* Boo! Chin up, Sam, my old friend.

**SAM** *(Jumping back in surprise)* Shrew! You made me jump!

**THE SHREW** Sorry mate. I was trying to make you laugh. You look so sad.

**SAM** I am sad. Nobody ever notices my hard work cleaning this smelly stable.

**THE SHREW** The animals notice.

**SAM** Maybe, but I wish I had an important job.

**THE SHREW** You do have an important job, Sam. Come on – I think we need a song to cheer you up!

**Song 1. THE STABLE HOEDOWN** CD track 1/9

*A small group could perform a simple line dance during Song 1, and a jolly fiddler could appear at the side of the stage, tapping his toes.*

**SAM** *(Laughing)* Oh Shrew, I feel much better now, but I need a rest after all that singing!

*Sam wipes his brow and sits on some hay. He jumps back up and runs around holding his bottom.*

**SAM** Ow, ow, ow. That hay is prickly. My poor bottom!

**THE SHREW** Never mind your bottom, Sam. What about the poor animals? How do they sleep on this prickly hay?

**SAM** I don't know. I'd better go and get some new soft hay for them.

**THE SHREW** Can I help? Pleeeeease?

**SAM** Okey-dokey! You sweep out the old hay and I'll bring in the new.

**Song 2. WORKING IN A STABLE** CD track 2/10

**Wit Play Script** is a highly acclaimed play written by Margaret Edson that delves deep into the themes of life, death, and the complexities of human relationships, all framed within the context of an academic environment. First premiered in 1995, "Wit" offers a unique perspective on terminal illness, employing sharp wit and poignant dialogue to navigate the emotional landscape of its protagonist, Vivian Bearing, a distinguished professor of English literature. This article will explore the play's plot, themes, characters, and its significance in contemporary theatre.

# Plot Overview

"Wit" follows the life of Vivian Bearing, who is diagnosed with advanced ovarian cancer. The narrative unfolds primarily within the confines of a hospital room where Vivian undergoes experimental treatment. As the story progresses, we witness her reflections on her life as a scholar and her relationships with those around her.

## Key Plot Points

1. Vivian's Diagnosis: The play opens with Vivian receiving her diagnosis, which sets the tone for her subsequent journey through treatment and self-reflection.
2. Flashbacks to Academia: The narrative includes flashbacks to her time as a professor, particularly focusing on her interpretation of John Donne's poetry, which mirrors her own struggles with mortality.
3. Interactions with Medical Staff: Vivian's interactions with her doctors and nurses, especially with Dr. Jason Posner, reveal her frustration with the clinical detachment prevalent in the medical field.
4. Moments of Reflection: Throughout her treatment, Vivian reflects on her life choices, her relationships with her estranged father, and her lack of emotional connections.
5. Climactic Revelation: The climax of the play occurs when Vivian's health deteriorates, forcing her to confront her own mortality and the meaning of her life as she grapples with the implications of her scholarly pursuits.

## Themes

"Wit" is rich in themes that resonate with audiences on multiple levels. The play effectively combines intellectual rigor with emotional depth, creating a tapestry of ideas that provoke thought and introspection.

## Mortality and Death

The most prominent theme in "Wit" is the confrontation with mortality. Vivian's journey is a poignant exploration of what it means to face death, particularly within the context of her scholarly life. Edson uses this theme to challenge the audience to consider their own relationships with life and death, and how one's profession can impact those perceptions.

## The Nature of Compassion

Another significant theme is the nature of compassion and the human connection. Through Vivian's interactions with the medical staff, the play critiques the often impersonal nature of healthcare. The lack of empathy displayed by some characters contrasts sharply with the moments of humanity exhibited by others, prompting the audience to consider the importance of compassion in both personal and professional realms.

## **Intellectualism vs. Emotionalism**

Vivian's character embodies the tension between intellectualism and emotionalism. As a scholar, she values knowledge and precision, yet she struggles to connect emotionally with others. This theme invites audiences to reflect on the balance between intellect and emotion in their own lives and the consequences of prioritizing one over the other.

## **Language and Communication**

Language plays a crucial role in "Wit," both as a tool for expression and as a barrier. Vivian's academic background in literature highlights the power of words, yet her struggle to communicate her vulnerability reveals the limitations of language in conveying profound human experiences. Edson's use of language throughout the play serves to emphasize this dichotomy.

## **Character Analysis**

The characters in "Wit" are intricately crafted, each serving a specific purpose in illustrating the play's central themes.

### **Vivian Bearing**

Vivian is the play's protagonist and a formidable figure in the academic world. Her intelligence, wit, and often acerbic demeanor mask her vulnerability. Throughout the play, she transitions from a confident professor to a patient grappling with the reality of her illness. This character arc is central to the emotional impact of the narrative.

### **Dr. Jason Posner**

Dr. Jason Posner is a young oncologist who admires Vivian's intellect but often falls short in terms of

empathy. His character serves as a critique of the medical profession's sometimes cold approach to patient care. Through his interactions with Vivian, the audience sees the tension between clinical detachment and human compassion.

## **Nurse Susie Monahan**

Nurse Susie represents the compassionate side of healthcare. She provides a stark contrast to Dr. Posner, embodying the warmth and empathy that Vivian craves. Susie's character highlights the importance of human connection in the healing process, making her a pivotal figure in Vivian's journey.

## **Vivian's Father**

Although he does not appear in the present timeline of the play, Vivian's father significantly impacts her character and motivations. Flashbacks reveal their strained relationship, which adds depth to Vivian's character and her reflections on love and loss.

## **Significance in Contemporary Theatre**

"Wit" has garnered critical acclaim and has become a staple in contemporary theatre for several reasons. Its exploration of profound themes through the lens of a female protagonist is a notable contribution to the canon of modern plays.

## **Empowerment of Female Voices**

Margaret Edson's "Wit" is particularly significant for its strong female lead and the exploration of issues surrounding women's health. Vivian's character challenges traditional portrayals of women in literature and theatre, presenting a complex individual who embodies both strength and vulnerability.

## **Impact on Healthcare Conversations**

The play has also sparked conversations about the healthcare system, particularly regarding the importance of compassion in patient care. By portraying the stark realities of illness and the emotional toll it takes on patients, "Wit" encourages audiences to advocate for more humane treatment in medical settings.

## Educational Value

"Wit" serves as an educational tool in various contexts, including literature and medical ethics courses. It invites discussions about the intersection of literature and life, the role of language in communication, and the ethical responsibilities of healthcare providers.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Margaret Edson's "Wit" is a masterful play that intricately weaves together themes of mortality, compassion, and the complexities of human relationships. Through the character of Vivian Bearing, Edson challenges audiences to reflect on their own lives, the nature of their connections, and the importance of compassion in the face of adversity. The play's enduring relevance and its capacity to provoke thought and discussion solidify its place as a significant work in contemporary theatre, making it a must-see for both audiences and scholars alike.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is the primary theme of the play 'Wit' by Margaret Edson?**

The primary theme of 'Wit' is the exploration of life, death, and the human experience, particularly through the lens of a terminally ill professor who reflects on her life, relationships, and the significance of language.

### **How does the character of Vivian Bearing evolve throughout the play?**

Vivian Bearing evolves from a highly intellectual and emotionally distant professor to a more introspective and vulnerable individual as she confronts her own mortality and the impact of her choices on her life and relationships.

### **What role does humor play in 'Wit'?**

Humor in 'Wit' serves as a coping mechanism for Vivian and highlights the absurdities of life and death, allowing both the character and the audience to engage with serious themes in a more accessible way.

### **How does 'Wit' address the concept of academic rigor versus human connection?**

The play contrasts Vivian's academic rigor and intellectual pursuits with her lack of personal connections, illustrating how her dedication to her field has come at the cost of emotional intimacy and meaningful

relationships.

### What is the significance of the title 'Wit'?

The title 'Wit' signifies not only Vivian's intellectual sharpness but also her journey towards understanding the deeper, more profound aspects of life, suggesting that true wit encompasses emotional insight and empathy.

## How does the play use literary references to enhance its themes?

The play incorporates numerous literary references, particularly to John Donne's poetry, which deepens the exploration of mortality, spirituality, and the intersection of intellect and human emotion.

## What impact did 'Wit' have on contemporary theatre?

Since its debut, 'Wit' has had a significant impact on contemporary theatre by bringing attention to the experiences of cancer patients, challenging stereotypes about illness, and promoting discussions around the intersection of academia and personal identity.

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