



Albee



Woolf



WAVW Cover

Just Add Water *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Starter Kit
Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1966). Directed by [Mike Nichols](#); Writing credits [Edward Albee](#) (play [1962]) [Ernest Lehman](#) (screenplay); Actors: [Elizabeth Taylor](#) Martha; [Richard Burton](#) George; [George Segal](#) Nick; [Sandy Dennis](#) Honey; **Runtime:** 134 min

Notes and Queries (in no particular order)

- Analyze Nick and Honey's relationship? Do they have illusions too?
- Aristotle believed that catharsis was the heart of the experience of tragedy. Do the characters themselves in WAVW experience catharsis?
- Comment on the film's use of music.
- "Do you always deal in appearances?" Martha asks Nick (?) Why is it a mistake at George and Martha's to "deal in appearances"?
- George threatens to have Martha "committed." Given what you know about her at the end of the play, could he?
- "Get the guests." How precisely does one play this game?
- Is George's novel true?
- Martha suggests, hurtfully, it seems, that George thinks their "son" may not be his? Is this true?
- Martha tells George that he cannot afford to waste liquor "on an associate professor's salary." What does it tell us about George that he is still an "associate professor"?
- Martha tells Nick she is an "earth mother." What is an "earth mother?" Is she one?
- Martha tells Nick that George has made the "insulting mistake of loving me." Explain.
- Nick tells George "You'll regret this." He replies, "No doubt. I regret everything." Explain.
- Nick tells George that he became a teacher for the "same things that motivated you." "What were they," George replies cynically. Explain.
- Nick: "There's no limit to you is there?" Martha: "No baby none." Explain.
- Notice all the ways in which Nichols show's us Martha's uncouthness (some examples: the chicken leg, her housecleaning techniques).
- Notice the lovely entrance of Nick and Honey as Martha brays "God damn you."
- Responding to the news that Honey is in the bathroom peeling labels off liquor bottles, George comments "We all peel labels." Explain.

- What are your favorite insults? How do they function in the play? My favorites: "I swear if you existed I'd divorce you" (Martha to George.) "Rubbing alcohol, Martha?" (George, fixing drinks, to Martha).
- What brings Nick to exclaim at the play's end "My God I think I understand this!"
- What effect does George's "mass for the dead" (including recitation in Latin) have on the tone of the play?
- What role does alcohol play in the play?
- When George insists he can't take any more of Martha's abuse, she responds "Why not? You married me for it." What does she mean? Is she right?
- Why does Albee use all those one word repetitions: "clink," "snap," etc.
- Why does this particular night result in "total war"?

Introductory Paragraph (use verbatim if you choose): Edward Albee's 1962 play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was brought to the screen in 1966 by first-time director Mike Nichols, with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor in the lead roles of George and Martha, a downtrodden college history professor and his blowsy wife, the daughter of the college president. *Who's Afraid* takes place in one night, as George and Martha "entertain" their guests, young, ambitious biology professor Nick (George Segal) and his very drunk wife Honey (Sandy Dennis), engaging them in a psychodrama of fun and games. **[Insert thesis statement (choices below) here.]**

Thesis Statements: Choose One.

- At one point in the play Martha ask Nick, "Do you always deal in appearances?" In *Who's Afraid* it is a mistake to understand people based on face values.
- Although the clear focus of both play and movie is the difficult and complex relationship of George and Martha, Nick and Honey's marriage is also of great interest.
- In an early scene of the play George confuses his and Nick's wives' names and when corrected by Nick, observes (redundantly but profoundly) that if he were married to Honey he would know what being married to Honey meant, and if Nick were married to Martha he would know what being married to Martha means. As this scene suggests, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is, in fact, a play about marriage.
- By the end of the night, the end of the play, we know a great deal about each of the four characters.
- In a late scene of the play, George, responding to the news that Honey is in the bathroom peeling labels off liquor bottles, comments "We all peel labels." Indeed, by the end of the night, the end of the play, many labels have been removed.
- When Martha suggests that her husband cannot tell truth from illusion, George replies "Yes, but we must carry on as though we did." *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* forces the audience to decide on the difference between truth and illusion as well.