

EDWARD ALBEE: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

- 1 **Either** (a) Discuss Albee's use of symbols and symbolism in the play.
- Or** (b) With close attention to detail, show how Albee builds dramatic tension between the four characters in this extract.

George [to NICK]: I wouldn't be surprised if you *did* take over the History Department one of these days.

Nick: The Biology Department.

George: The *Biology* Department ... of course. I seem preoccupied with history. Oh! What a remark. [*He strikes a pose, his hand over his heart, his head raised, his voice stentorian.*] 'I am preoccupied with history.' 5

Martha [*as HONEY and NICK chuckle*]: Ha, ha, ha, HA!

George [*with some disgust*]: I think I'll make *myself* a drink.

Martha: George is not preoccupied with *history*... George is preoccupied with the *History Department*. George is preoccupied with the History Department because ... 10

George: ... because he is *not* the History Department, but is only *in* the History Department. We know, Martha ... we went all through it while you were upstairs ... getting up. There's no need to go through it again. 15

Martha: That's right, baby ... keep it clean. [*To the others*] George is bogged down in the History Department. He's an old bog in the History Department, that's what George is. A bog.... A fen.... A.G.D. swamp. Ha, ha, ha, HA! A SWAMP! Hey, swamp! Hey SWAMPY! 20

George [*with a great effort he controls himself ... then, as if she had said nothing more than 'George, dear' ...*]: Yes, Martha? Can I get you something?

Martha [*amused at his game*]: Well ... uh ... sure, you can light my cigarette, if you're of a mind to. 25

George [*considers, then moves off*]: No ... there are limits. I mean, man can put up with only so much without he descends a rung or two on the old evolutionary ladder ... [*Now a quick aside to NICK*] ... which is up your line ... [*Then back to MARTHA*] ... sinks, Martha, and it's a funny ladder ... you can't reverse yourself ... start back up once you're descending. 30

[*MARTHA blows him an arrogant kiss.*]

Now ... I'll hold your hand when it's dark and you're afraid of the bogey man, and I'll tote your gin bottles out after midnight, so no one'll see ... but I will not light your cigarette. And that, as they say, is that. 35

[*Brief silence.*]

Martha [*under her breath*]: Jesus! [*Then, immediately, to NICK*] Hey, you played football, hunh? 40

Honey [*as NICK seems sunk in thought*]: Dear ...

3

Nick: Oh! Oh, yes ... I was a ... quarterback ... but I was much more ... adept ... at boxing, really.

Martha [*with great enthusiasm*]: BOXING! You hear that, George? 45

George [*resignedly*]: Yes, Martha.

Martha [*to NICK, with peculiar intensity and enthusiasm*]: You musta been pretty good at it ... I mean, you don't look like you got hit in the face at all.

Honey [*proudly*]: He was intercollegiate state middleweight champion. 50

Nick [*embarrassed*]: Honey ...

Honey: Well, you were.

Martha: You look like you still got a pretty good body *now*, too ... is that right? Have you? 55

George [*intensely*]: Martha ... decency forbids ...

Martha [*to GEORGE ... still staring at NICK, though*]: SHUT UP!
[*Now, back to NICK*] Well, have, you? Have you kept your body?

Nick [*unselfconscious ... almost encouraging her*]: It's still pretty good. I work out. 60

Martha [*with a half-smile*]: Do you!

Nick: Yeah.

Honey: Oh, yes ... he has a very ... firm body.

Martha [*still with that smile ... a private communication with NICK*]: 65
Have you! Oh, I think that's very nice.

Act 1