GREAT PLAYS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

Classroom Resource

1 Play the Games

Have students perform a round of 'Get the Guests' or 'Humiliate the Host,' then unpack how Albee's party-game structure lets George and Martha attack each other under cover of a rule. Ask what breaks when a player refuses to play along.

2 Design the Living Room

In small groups, students design a single living-room set that must hold a 2 a.m. faculty party, a marriage's private war, and a fabricated child's 'death' without a single scene change — then justify how lighting alone signals the shift from host to combatant.

3 Hot-Seat George and Martha

One student takes on George or Martha while classmates question them in role about the son, the biting, and the marriage. Push the group to test whether either character is telling the truth — or whether truth is even the point.

4 Stage vs Screen

Compare a short stage extract with the equivalent scene from Mike Nichols' 1966 film. What does Taylor and Burton's close-up give an actor that a live audience can't — and what does the camera cost the play's claustrophobia?

5 Staging the Boy Who Isn't There

Design task: students devise a way to represent the imaginary son on stage — a chair, a photograph, an empty upstairs room — without ever literalising him. Present and defend why the choice makes his 'death' land harder.

6 The Shape of the Night

Extended writing prompt (SAC or essay): "How does Albee's three-part structure — Fun and Games, Walpurgisnacht, The Exorcism — chart the dismantling of illusion across a single night?" Works as a practice response or formal task.

7 Stage Directions as Script

Albee's directions specify exactly how George crosses to the bar, or how Martha moves toward Nick. Give students an unmarked excerpt describing an entrance or a gesture, have them block it from the cues alone, then compare it with what the dialogue alone suggests.

8 Chart the Night

As a class, build a timeline across the play marking each drink poured, each game declared, and each illusion cracked — from 'Fun and Games' to the final exorcism. Use it to argue exactly when the marriage's real fight begins.

9 Props as Character

Assign students an object — the telegram, the bourbon bottle, or Martha's clinking ice — and have them trace it through the play, arguing how it carries what a character can't say aloud.

10 The Confessional Tradition

Position the play within the confrontational American tradition it helped push forward. Students research a later 'descendant' — Tracy Letts's August: Osage County, Yasmina Reza's God of Carnage, or Marsha Norman's 'night, Mother — and present one technique it borrows from Albee.

Quick-fire discussion questions

- Whose games are crueler — George's or Martha's?
- Can Nick and Honey really be called innocent bystanders?
- Why end a play built on games without anyone winning?
- What does the title's nursery-rhyme joke actually mean, once the lights come up?