CHAPTER 3

Woman of the Year

1942 | DIRECTED BY GEORGE STEVENS

TEACHER OVERVIEW

In *Woman of the Year,* Katherine Hepburn portrays Tess Harding, a dynamic and self-assured journalist who writes about international politics. At a time when most women reporters were assigned society page news describing debutante balls and fashion trends, Harding's strongly opinionated editorials appeared on page one. Her nemesis is Sam Craig (played by Spencer Tracy), a sportswriter who is both attracted to and frustrated by Harding's intelligence and verve. They fall in love and marry, and that is when the conflict of expectations begins.

> "The woman's film was successful because it worked out of a paradox. It both held women in social bondage and released them into a dream of potency and freedom. It drew women in with images of what was lacking in their own lives and sent them home reassured that their own lives were the right thing after all."
>
> —JEANINE BASINGER, *A WOMAN'S VIEW: HOW HOLLYWOOD SPOKE TO WOMEN, 1930 - 1960*

The movie is a classic role-reversal story. This type of narrative is one in which traditional gender roles are switched—the woman assumes the role of an authoritative and independent character while the man portrays a dependent or otherwise powerless character who is befuddled (most often by the woman). Reversal stories play off an audience's expectations or assumptions about men and women and in this way can challenge an audience's thinking about gender role norms during the period in which the movie was produced. As film historian Jeanine Basinger explains, the role reversal movie "showed that women could do the same jobs that men did and behave in the same way. Audiences saw it on-screen. It became fact, giving women in the audience a new way of approaching their own concerns."

Woman of the Year is based to a large extent on Dorothy Thompson and Ann O'Hare McCormick, two acclaimed journalists who wrote about international politics in the years prior to and during the Second World War. Even so, the director, George Stevens, and the producer, Joseph L. Mankiewicz, feared that women in the audience would find the fictional Tess Harding too opinionated, too masculine in her career aspirations. The original ending written by Ring Lardner Jr. and Michael Kanin had Harding taking an interest in sports and her husband's career while he likewise took an interest in hers. The director and producer nixed that ending, replacing it with a more traditional resolution: Harding attempts to rekindle her husband's love by making him breakfast. She fails miserably. She becomes the befuddled one—unable to light the gas stove or operate the toaster and the coffee pot.

Actor Katherine Hepburn, herself a proclaimed feminist, disliked the new ending, seeing no reason to humiliate her character. The "real" Tess—Dorothy Thompson, likewise found the ending unnecessary and completely unbelievable. Even so, the breakfast scene resonated positively with 1940s audiences who apparently loved seeing this strong and independent woman get her comeuppance. Tess Harding might have a brilliant mind, but the ordinary housewife in the audience could best her at breakfast any day!

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

Basic to understanding the concept of role reversal in this 1940s film, students need to understand the difference between the public and private sphere regarding gender roles. Social conventions deemed that a woman's place was in the home whereas a man's place was working outside the home. Lesson 1's

pre-screening discussions focus on this type of thinking, which dominated the 19th century and early decades of the 20th century. The film has many allusions to 1940s politics which the audiences *of that time* would have understood. Because students in the 21st century may not understand the allusions, the pre-screening discussions and reading selections introduce them to this historical context.

Lesson 1 introduces the protagonists and their hardheadedness. Tess and Sam come from two very different worlds within the public sphere. She is internationally chic; he is unabashedly hometown Americana. Lessons 2 and 3 focus on the developing plot and the characters' witty repartee.

Teacher's Note: You will need to rent, borrow or purchase a copy of *Woman of the Year.*

LESSON	ACTIVITIES	MATERIALS
1. His World, Her World	A. As American as Baseball B. International Intrigues	**PPT slides 1 – 9** Film Reader Selections: • "Letter from Franklin Roosevelt to Kenesaw M. Landis, Commissioner of Baseball, 1942" • "Excerpt from 'Abroad,' June 21, 1936"
2. Honor and Obey	C. Wife D. Mother	**PPT slides 10 – 15** Film Reader Selections: • "The Wagner-Rogers Bill" • "Analyzing Dialogue: The Proposal" Module 4 Supplemental Clip Reel
3. The Comeuppance	E. Vows	**PPT slides 16 – 18** Module 4 Supplemental Clip Reel

LESSON 1

His World, Her World

> *I honestly feel that it would be best for the country to keep baseball going. There will be fewer people unemployed and everybody will work longer hours and harder than ever before. And that means that they ought to have a chance for recreation and for taking their minds off their work even more than before.*
>
> —PRESIDENT FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, IN A LETTER TO KENESAW M. LANDIS, COMMISSIONER OF BASEBALL, 1942

ACTIVITY A: AS AMERICAN AS BASEBALL

ENGAGE

Introduce the concept of the public and private sphere. The phrases "public sphere" and "private sphere" typically refer to the separation of home and family from the world of employment and politics outside of the home. In the past, society used the distinction of public and private sphere to identify traditional gender roles and the division of labor. A woman's place was the private sphere, i.e., caring for her home and family rather than venturing into the public world and doing work typically considered a man's responsibility. Social stereotypes in the past reinforced the distinction between what a woman was

emotionally or physically capable of doing and what a man could accomplish. Relative to that stereotypical thinking, a woman lacked the physical strength, emotional stamina, and intellectual skills to withstand the demands of business and politics.

PPT **Display and discuss PPT slide 2: The Public and Private Sphere.** Women have always challenged or exceeded social expectations of behavior that limited them to the private sphere. The women's suffrage movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries, in particular, tested the logic of preventing women from entering the public sphere.

> **ASK:** What was occurring in the world in 1917 and then in 1920 that would have led to these editorial cartoons being published? *In 1917, the First World War (or the Great War as it was known then) created opportunities for women to mobilize on the home front, leaving their homes in order to work for the war effort. In 1920, the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution gave women the right to vote. Students should note the rung more than halfway up the ladder reads "women's suffrage."*

These two events—World War I and the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution—created opportunities for women to enter the public sphere. The editorial cartoons suggest a change in social attitudes about what women were or were not able to achieve professionally.

EXPLAIN & EXPLORE

PPT **Display and discuss PPT slide 3: Eleanor Roosevelt's Press Women.** Share the information below, taken from *War, Women, and the News: How Female Journalists Won the Battle to Cover World War II.*

> *Hard news stories focused on often violent and grim events—murders, fires, bank robberies. Many editors and a good deal of society, too, believed a woman's spirit was too fragile to write about such harsh happenings. They did not have the mental skills required to interpret news; women, or so society believed, were emotional and sympathetic and therefore better suited to soft news. . .*
>
> *In Washington, D.C., the National Press Club banned women journalists from membership. Nor were women invited to the many White House press briefings. This type of female exclusion was called "skirting," a reference to women's clothing. Skirting happened in other places besides the newsroom. Women could not enlist in the military and so could not fight as soldiers for their country. . .*
>
> *"When Mrs. Roosevelt swept into the White House like a strong April breeze," said Ishbel Ross, "she blew the cobwebs of tradition out the window, invited the [ladies of the] press upstairs, showed them where the President slept, let them look at him having his tea, and generally made them feel that they were welcome."*
>
> *The First Lady did more than give the ladies of the press a tour of the White House. She created the Monday morning press conference. No First Lady had ever held weekly press conferences. Mrs. Roosevelt was the first, and she insisted that only women reporters could attend.*

Share this additional information about Mrs. Roosevelt's Monday morning press conference.

> Women worked on newspapers but most were assigned to cover soft news, or the women's society page news. Once Mrs. Roosevelt announced her women-only press conferences, quite a number of newspapers scrambled to reassign or to hire women to cover the White House. In this way, the First Lady opened doors for women in journalism. For example, the United Press news service, or UP, had resisted hiring women. To ensure their news service had representation at the First Lady's Monday morning press briefings, the editor hired reporter Ruby Black.

PPT **Display and discuss PPT slide 4: Anne O'Hare McCormick and Dorothy Thompson.** *Woman of the Year* is not historical fiction. However, two individuals were the inspiration for the story of Tess Harding. Anne O'Hare McCormick and Dorothy Thompson were internationally acclaimed political columnists during

the 1930s and 1940s. As news correspondents, they traveled through Europe and reported on the political changes underway. Each wrote a column that was syndicated and published in newspapers across the country. With a national readership, their opinions on world affairs and leaders were generally well known and respected.

McCormick wrote a news column titled "Abroad" for the *New York Times.* Her editor stated that McCormick's mission was "to stand up on your hind legs and shout whenever freedom is interfered with in any part of the world." Anne had proven herself to be so good at her work that the *Times* appointed her to its editorial board, the first woman journalist in America to receive such recognition. In 1936, she won the Pulitzer Prize for journalism, again the first woman journalist to do so.

Thompson likewise earned distinction for her work, becoming the first female journalist to head a news bureau in Europe. By 1938, her column "On the Record," was one of the most widely read political opinion columns in the country. She was also one of the highest paid journalists. The June 12, 1939 cover article of *Time* magazine described Thompson as the second most influential woman in America, second only to Eleanor Roosevelt. This description is used in the movie to describe the fictional character Tess Harding.

The inspiration for the character of Sam Craig, purportedly, was Ring Lardner, an American sportswriter, short story author, and playwright.



Screen *Woman of the Year*: "Bylines and Baseball" (chapters 1 – 3 on a DVD of the film**).**

PPT

Discussion questions appear on **PPT slide 5.**

GUIDED DISCUSSION

1. How is the audience introduced to Tess Harding?
   Initially through newspaper headlines and advertisements that identify her as a journalist who has strong opinions about world affairs, such as "Tess Harding Welcomed in London" and "What Do You Think? Tess Harding Tells You Daily." Next, the audience hears her speaking on a radio program. Note also the comments the men in the restaurant make about her. This, too, is a way of introducing the character, by showing what others think of her. Pinkie calls her an intellectual. Sam says he's never met her but heard she won't speak to anyone who has not signed a "non-aggression pact." His sarcasm suggests Harding thinks she is superior to others.

2. How is Sam Craig introduced to the audience?
   Through a single newspaper headline about the Yankees baseball team, followed by shots of him in Pinkie's restaurant.

3. What triggers the feud between Sam and Tess?
   On the radio, Tess suggests abolishing baseball until the war is over. Sam expresses his anger by saying the war is threatening the American way of life, and baseball is an important part of that. He asks, "What's the sense of abolishing the thing you're trying to protect?"

4. The first time Sam sees Tess is in his editor's office. Describe the shot and provide a reason why you think the director chose to shoot the scene in this way.
   The camera shows the audience what Sam sees first—Tess's leg as she adjusts her stockings. The camera then shows the audience Sam's reaction to this. Some students may describe this reaction as surprised, amused, or lascivious/lustful. Emphasize this key point: the audience sees Tess through Sam's eyes. The director uses this shot to emphasize that Tess is a young, attractive woman.

5. Sam's world includes the press box at sports games. How do the other reporters react when Sam brings Tess to the press box during the baseball game?
   One reporter seems upset, describing it with an allusion to the Black Sox Scandal of 1919, which many in the audience in the 1940s would remember but clearly students today likely would

not know. Emphasize this key point: women were not admitted to the press box for sporting events. Nor were journalists of color. At this time in America's history, baseball was segregated. Segregation is also evident in the press box.

PPT

6. Study the still frames on **PPT slide 6**: **"Tess in Sam's World."** Explain how these four images capture Tess Harding's understanding of baseball and her change in behavior as the game goes on. *Top left: Sam explains the rules of the game and the camera shows the reaction of the other* Chronicle *sportswriter who covers his eyes in disbelief about her lack of knowledge about the game. Top right: Tess has no sensitivity to the other spectators in the stands, wearing her large brimmed hat which prevents the man behind her from seeing the play. Bottom left: Tess hides from the man behind her whose shouting annoys her. Bottom right: Tess has removed her hat, jumps up and cheers, suggesting she is beginning to understand not just the rules of the game but why so many people enjoy it.*

Conclude the activity by reading and discussing "Letter from Franklin Roosevelt to Kenesaw M. Landis, Commissioner of Baseball, 1942" (Portraits of America Film Reader). President Roosevelt wrote this response to a letter he received from Landis, who was the Commissioner of Major League Baseball in 1942. Landis had queried the president as to whether the baseball season for 1942 should continue to operate, given the nation was at war. In *Woman of the Year*, Tess expresses the opinion that baseball is not as important as world affairs and that the game should be suspended during wartime so people could focus their attention on the war effort and defeating the Axis powers.

ASK: In what way does this letter from the president reflect the mindset of Sam Craig in the movie as presented in the segment you just screened? *Sam is in agreement with the president, although no mention of the president or the real-world letter is alluded to in the film.*

ACTIVITY B: INTERNATIONAL INTRIGUES

ENGAGE

Read and discuss "Excerpt from 'Abroad,' June 21, 1936" (Portraits of America Film Reader).

GUIDED DISCUSSION

1. McCormick describes the changes occurring in Europe during this period as "seismic." What does she mean?
   Seismic refers to shaking or destructive vibrations that occur as the result of an earthquake. Her word choice suggests that the political conflicts and resulting changes in Europe are likewise destructive.

2. Explain the metaphor McCormick uses to describe the people of the world.
   She compares people to houses. In some houses the people huddle with their shutters closed, ignoring the conflicts and/or hoping the crisis will pass. In other houses, the people argue because of the uncertainty of what may happen to them and their country.

3. McCormick states that the United States has also changed. But she notes also the difference between the American people and the people of Europe. How do the Americans differ, in her opinion?
   She does not compare Americans to houses with shutters closed. However, she notes that people who once were certain that the conflicts in Europe would not affect them have begun to understand that their own way of life may be affected. She notes also that should the political upheaval in Europe affect Americans, it might divide the country as to what the best remedy should be.

4. How does this news column differ from a news article?
   McCormick is not reporting a news event. She is commenting on both the re-nomination and confidence in Roosevelt amid the political turmoil in Europe.

Conclude the discussion by asking students to imagine who might have found this article particularly interesting in 1936. In other words, who is her intended audience?
Answers will vary. Both men and women would have been interested in this piece, but very likely not every man or every woman in America would have read her column or understood the complexities of what she was describing. Business leaders and politicians not just in America but worldwide would have found her column worthy of reading, given her expertise in the realm of politics.

EXPLAIN & EXPLORE



Screen *Woman of the Year*: "Tess's League of Nations" (chapters 4 – 7 on a DVD of the film).

PPT

Discussion questions appear on **PPT slides 7 and 8.**

GUIDED DISCUSSION

1. When Tess asks Sam who won the game, he answers, "the Yanks." What is her response and what does her response reveal about her?
   Her response — "How nice. Everyone in Philadelphia must be so happy." — is meant to be humorous. Quite likely the audience then would have known (as do many audiences today) that the Yankees are based in New York City, not Philadelphia. The delivery of her lines, however, and the way in which she starts looking around at her other guests suggest that she was not really interested in the outcome of the game. She was just being polite. Her response trivializes the subject and, indirectly, Sam's work.

2. A theme that runs through this film is miscommunication. Explain how miscommunication—and/or the inability to communicate—creates both awkwardness and comedy during the scene in Tess's apartment.
   Sam arrives under the assumption that Tess invited only him to her apartment. The large box of flowers he carries suggests this. Once he discovers Tess is holding a party, he discards the box outside the apartment. The maid, however, returns them to him. Tess sails through the room, speaking to guests in French and Russian. Sam speaks neither language, and this leaves him unable to communicate. When he does discover two men speaking English, they abruptly revert to Spanish once Sam approaches, again shutting him out. Sam's frustration results in his walking out without telling Tess he is leaving.

3. Describe Tess's office. How does her office differ from the space where Sam works, and what does this suggest about their positions on the newspaper?
   She has a private office with a personal secretary. A world map hangs on the wall apropos of what she writes about. She also has a teletype machine. In contrast, Sam's office is more open. While it is a private space, it has windows looking out onto the newsroom where other reporters are at work. A baseball is dead center on his desk. He has no personal secretary. While answers will vary as to how their work spaces define the characters and their work status at the newspaper, Tess's space is more private, exclusive—the secretary controls who speaks to her or gets into her inner office. This suggests her work is more confidential and considered more serious/important than Sam's sports column.

4. In the scene at Riverside Hall, Tess addresses a large gathering of women. She is at the podium, the only one who speaks. The camera, however, focuses on Sam. What is being communicated to the audience about Sam?
   He charges onto the stage without thinking that perhaps he might be interrupting (much as he tried to walk into Tess's office before being stopped by her secretary). While Tess speaks of

women's rights, he fumbles with cigarettes. When the women give Ellen Whitcomb a standing ovation, he is the last one to stand and applaud. He has not heard what Tess has said. Just as she has trivialized baseball, his behavior trivializes her interests.

PPT

5. Review the still frames on **PPT slide 9**: **"Sam in Tess's World."** Explain how these scenes capture Sam's awkwardness when he attempts to socialize with Tess's professional colleagues. *Top right: Sam sits alone until another man joins him. The costuming and dialogue (the man repeating "yes" to everything Sam says) suggest he does not understand English. Sam feels silly and thoroughly out of place with no one he can relate to. Bottom left: Sam stumbles onto stage during a speech Tess is making, triggering laughter from the all-woman audience. He hides behind the flowers, suggesting again his embarrassment. Bottom right: Showing Sam as the only man sitting on stage among the women emphasizes that he is again an outsider. The line of dialogue at this point, spoken by Tess, is that a woman's place is no longer in the home but on the "first line" of battle. The women seated in the chairs represent this line.*

Conclude the activity by discussing the following question: In *Woman of the Year*, both Tess and Sam are witty, intelligent writers. Their conversations are likewise quick-witted and smart. But their voices differ. How so? *Tess talks about international affairs and political leaders. Sam talks about sports and ordinary Americans. Tess's lines are often complex. She speaks quickly, snapping off lines, often in foreign languages, and making offhand allusions to important political leaders. Sam speaks more slowly. Like the audience he writes for, he speaks simply and directly without referencing world events or leaders. He is more of a listener whereas Tess barks orders and dominates the conversation.*

LESSON 2

Honor and Obey

> *What role reversals accomplished was a reconsideration of gender activities. Men were demeaned by being put into the woman's traditional position, and women were often made to look cruel and domineering when put in the man's. This did not necessarily in and of itself mean that everything was wrong, but it did point up certain things. It showed that society did not feel that the work women usually do was important; when a man was put in an apron and made to order groceries, it made a servant out of him. It showed that certain qualities that were thought to be masculine were actually bullying and unpleasant when a woman in shoulder pads barked inhuman orders to her staff. But these role reversals also showed that women could do the same jobs that men did and behave in the same way. Audiences saw it on-screen. It became fact, giving women in the audience a new way of approaching their own concerns.*
>
> —JEANINE BASINGER, *A WOMAN'S VIEW: HOW HOLLYWOOD SPOKE TO WOMEN, 1930 – 1960*

ACTIVITY C: WIFE

EXPLAIN & EXPLORE

PPT

Display and discuss PPT slide 10: Role Reversals in the Movies.

In a role-reversal story, two people who are significantly different—either in age, gender, employment, or some other characteristic, switch positions. Role reversal is a common plot device in many Hollywood films. For example, in the 2018 movie *Incredibles 2* (top left image), Bob and Helen are husband and wife superheroes. In this film, Helen (Elastigirl) saves the world while Bob (Mr. Incredible) stays at home to take care of his superhero children.

Role reversal need not be limited to husbands and wives. The 1959 movie *Some Like It Hot* (top right) uses a reversal of sexual identity for humor. Two male musicians who witness a mob murder disguise themselves as women (Daphne and Josephine) and join an all-female orchestra in order to go into hiding. The switch provides humor but also insight as Daphne and Josephine begin to appreciate some of the challenges that women face in society.

Role reversals need not be limited to gender roles. The bottom frame is from the 1988 movie *Big.* A 12-year-old boy wishes he were bigger and, in a moment of movie magic, he wakes the next morning to discover he now inhabits the body of an adult man. He's still a kid mentally, but physically—even his mother does not recognize him. Again, humor ensues but also insight into adulthood and the need for the older generation to remember and experience the joys of not taking the world so seriously.

All role-reversal plots have one thing in common: they play off an audience's expectations and assumptions and in doing so, challenge those assumptions.

> **ASK:** What examples of role reversal can you identify in *Woman of the Year,* up to this point?
> *Tess's character challenges the stereotype that women are either smart or beautiful, but rarely both. When Sam first sees Tess, it is not her mind that attracts him. It is her legs. This is something the audience in 1942 would expect, as it mirrors social conventions of the time. That Tess pursues Sam, rather than him pursuing her, is also a reversal of traditional behavior of that time. Tess sends him a bottle of wine. Tess invites him to kiss her.*

Screen *Woman of the Year*: "Role Reversals" (chapters 8 – 13 on a DVD of the film).

PPT Discussion questions appear on **PPT slide 11.**

GUIDED DISCUSSION

1. Both Sam and Tess like their jobs. What does Sam like about his job? What does Tess like about hers?
   While driving Ellen Whitcomb home from the airport, Sam tells her that he likes meeting people and writing about them. In Pinkie's place, Tess tells Sam she likes knowing more about the world than most people do, and she likes telling people what she knows. Prompt further discussion by asking students to explain the difference. Sam writes to inform but also to give ordinary people a voice. Tess writes to inform but also to persuade. Her subjects are generally extraordinary people such as world leaders.

2. What expository information do you learn about Tess during her conversation with Sam in Pinkie's place?
   Tess talks about her past as the daughter of a diplomat, i.e., living in foreign countries and attending international schools. This explicit information communicates that she did not grow up in the United States and explains her ability to speak multiple languages.

3. Comment on Tess's behavior in Pinkie's place. What can you infer about her character from this behavior?
   She matches Sam drink for drink, bragging that she has never "wound up under the table" (meaning gotten intoxicated). However, she does wind up under the table—literally—as she searches for some item she dropped. Nor is she able to hold her liquor as she has said. Her lack of inhibitions is suggested through her body language, inching closer to Sam, which shifts the casual conversation to a more intimate encounter.

4. What does Sam mean when he tells Tess that he was there the day she came home to America?
   She had spent and continues to spend most of her time with foreigners, either diplomats or politicians. In the ballpark, she was in the midst of ordinary Americans.

5. The romantic scene in Tess's apartment at night illustrates the use of role reversal. Explain this reversal.
Audience expectations circa 1942 would have been for the man to pursue the woman. However, Tess is the more aggressive of the two. She tells Sam to send the cab away and urges him to stay. Sam is hesitant to pursue the romantic evening and eventually leaves the apartment.

6. Why is Tess in such a hurry to set the wedding date? Why does Sam wish to wait?
Answers will vary. Tess is someone who is accustomed to doing things her way. She obviously has a very busy schedule and so fitting the wedding into that schedule is a matter of convenience rather than romance. In another example of role reversal, Sam is the one who says he always had envisioned his wedding day as something special that required thought and time to plan.

Think more about it. Tess's world and Sam's collide on their wedding night. Aside from the intended comedy that results from misunderstanding, what is the purpose of this scene? What do the wedding night interruptions suggest about their marriage? *Answers will vary but should focus on the main idea that Tess's job takes precedence over her marriage. The scene also suggests that despite becoming Mrs. Craig, Tess is not about to change her lifestyle or career.*

PPT **Display and discuss PPT slide 12: The Role-Reversal Plot**. Ask students to comment on this statement by film historian Jeanine Basinger.

ASK:

1. Up to this point in the film, what scene, if any, demeans Sam Craig?
Some students may cite the scene where he walks on stage during Tess's speech. His awkwardness is funny and perhaps uncomfortable. Others may note that he gives in too easily when Tess pushes for a hurried wedding, or that the wedding night scene shows a lack of respect for him. Accept all reasonable responses.

2. Is Tess Harding a bully? Is her aggressiveness unattractive and self-serving?
Answers will vary. Accept all reasonable responses.

ACTIVITY D: MOTHER

ENGAGE

Read and discuss "The Wagner-Rogers Bill" (Portraits of America Film Reader). In this column, Dorothy Thompson writes about the increasing problem of child refugees from Europe. The proposed bill, if passed, would allow approximately 20,000 refugee children living under the German Reich to come to the United States. At that time, the United States had an immigration quota. This bill would have allowed the children to immigrate despite the quota.

GUIDED DISCUSSION

1. What argument does Thompson make for supporting the Wagner-Rogers Bill?
The children are from families with "better backgrounds" in that they are healthy and many are well-educated. The children come from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds and will be placed in American homes throughout the country and not just in one location.

2. Why are these children refugees?
They are caught in a world on the cusp of war. Their families have been identified as political enemies of their home countries. Many children are orphaned due to the political persecution in Europe.

3. In what way would passage of this bill be a humanitarian act, according to the author?
   Providing a safe home to children who are victims of political turmoil would be, as Thompson quotes Whitman, "a generosity in spirit" worthy of Americans.

Share this additional information. The bill failed to pass into law. Opposition to the bill included these arguments: (a) admitting refugee children would lead to unemployment in the United States, (b) the U.S. limited the number of immigrants from particular countries, and admitting these children—most of whom were from Germany—would have exceeded established quotas, and (c) charitable efforts ought to be given to impoverished American children rather than refugees.

Emphasize this key point. Taking a stand on a political issue like this fits the fictional character of Tess Harding.

EXPLAIN & EXPLORE

Discuss dialogue in a screenplay. Writing dialogue is a complex skill. In a movie, showing rather than telling is key. Dialogue, however, plays an important role in developing both characters and relationships, as well as advancing the plot and providing, when needed, expository information. Students will benefit from screening key scenes, paying particular attention to dialogue.

Key points to keep in mind about dialogue are that it:

- reveals character and voice;
- advances the plot and enhances drama/humor;
- provides expository information;
- can be entertaining as well as insightful and informative.



Read "Analyzing Dialogue: The Proposal" (Portraits of America Film Reader).

GUIDED DISCUSSION

Part 1: In the Wire Room

1. How does dialogue advance the plot?
   In explaining why he left her apartment the night before, Sam expresses his love for Tess and his desire to marry her.

2. What does dialogue reveal about Sam's character? About Tess's character?
   Answers will vary. Sam's proposal is more than an expression of love. It suggests his traditional values of wanting to marry. The dialogue reveals Tess's independence and her belief that marriage would tie her down.

3. What lines of dialogue enhance the humor?
   The lines "Anything happening?" and Tess's reply "Plenty" is a double entendre. The editor who interrupts Sam and Tess in the wire room is asking about the update on the missing diplomat, but her answer also refers to the romance between Sam and Tess.

Part 2: In Sam's Office

4. What new information about Sam do you learn from this telephone conversation?
   He has told his mother about Tess and stresses that this woman is the one he wants to marry. Ensure students understand that this scene is also an example of role reversal. Traditionally, movies would show the woman being excited about marrying and calling her mother with the good news.

Part 3: In Tess's Office

5. How does the dialogue in this scene reinforce Tess's dominance in the relationship she has with Sam?
   She has decided to get married and does not want to wait. Before Sam arrives, she has already instructed her secretary to find the best location for a quick ceremony with a justice of the peace that will fit her busy schedule.

6. How does the dialogue in this scene reinforce the role-reversal plot of this film?
   Traditionally, movies would show the woman's eagerness to have all the details just right—the date, the dress, and the flowers. But in this scene, Sam is the one who does not want to rush. He wants to think about it, plan for it.

Screen *Woman of the Year*: "Analyzing Dialogue: The Proposal" (on the Module 4 Supplemental Clip Reel). Although these three scenes are just under four minutes, a great deal happens. As you watch the scenes, observe closely how the actors deliver their lines and how the camera frames the characters to enhance meaning.

Screen *Woman of the Year*: "Someone Who Shares Your Interests" (chapters 14 – 19 on a DVD of the film).

PPT Discussion questions appear on **PPT slide 13**.

GUIDED DISCUSSION

1. Explain the significance of Sam's new hat. What does this seemingly minor detail suggest about Sam's relationship with Tess?
   Sam waits until he gets home before putting on his new hat. He puts it on outside the apartment door, suggesting he is preening a bit before he sees Tess, perhaps hoping to impress her with his dapper appearance. She, however, does not notice the hat and when she learns it is new, she makes little of it. This small detail of plot suggests friction in the marriage caused by her lack of attention to him.

2. Tess's father expresses regret that he had never remarried. What reason does he give for not asking Ellen to marry him?
   He never found the right moment to ask her. Students must infer that his career as a diplomat took priority over his need for a wife.

3. How does Tess's father envision a good marriage? Is this the sort of marriage Sam has?
   The father's vision is a relationship not just of love or romance but also caring about the other's interests. Sam's comment that "it doesn't always work so perfectly" suggests he believes Tess does not share his interests and cares little about his work.

PPT

4. View the image on **PPT slide 14**: **The Room Where Chris Sleeps**. What do you notice about this room? What is or is not appropriate about this room for a child of Chris's age?
   He sleeps in Tess's office. Aside from the toys on the bed, everything else is related to Tess's work—the globe, the teletype machine, the desk, and a wall of books that that seem not to be appropriate for children, i.e., not storybooks. While the toys may be appropriate, they are simply set on the bed, as if on display. The room doesn't suggest a child lives there.

5. Comment on the scene where Tess goes to the Greek Children's home to bring Chris back to her apartment. In particular, comment on the dialogue between her and the home's director and the conversation between Tess and Chris.
   Through dialogue and action, Tess communicates a lack of sensitivity towards Chris. Although it is late, she wants the director to wake him and bring him downstairs. She ignores the director's argument that Chris would be better in a home with other children. This emphasizes Tess's stubbornness and her vanity that she would look ridiculous if she did not keep the child.

Although the exchange between Tess and Chris is in Greek without any translation, students will infer that he resists returning with Tess. Note how he pulls away from her, and she has to tug him to step closer to her. Also, the close-up on his face communicates his dislike of her.

Think more about it. Is Tess solely to blame for the friction in this marriage? Has Sam shown any evidence of trying to learn more about her world of international politics? *Answers will vary. The movie is told more from Sam's perspective and so his frustration with Tess is more obvious than her disappointment in him. He makes little effort to learn about her work, at least none that is shown in the film.*

PPT **Display PPT slide 15: Analyzing Dialogue.** Comment on the lines of dialogue below, spoken by Tess in this segment. What do each of these lines reveal about Tess's character and her marriage to Sam?

a. "How could I possibly have a baby?"
Tess has not considered motherhood as a possibility in her marriage to Sam. This line, in particular, stresses her real hesitation to give up her career in order to become a mother.

b. "The most wonderful thing that's ever happened to me has just happened."
Tess's comment reinforces her self-centeredness and insensitivity to others. She has been in the middle of an argument with Sam over adopting Chris when she receives the news that she has been named "outstanding woman of the year." That award is more meaningful to her than becoming a foster mother to Chris, more meaningful to her than even her marriage to Sam.

c. "You simply don't want to come to the dinner. That's why you're putting on this paternal act."
In Tess's mind, everything that occurs, or everything someone says, is about her. She lacks empathy towards Chris and Sam. Sam's decision to stay home with Chris is that of a responsible parent and is not an "act."

d. "Who would believe that you had anything that was important enough?"
Tess fails to complete this sentence, realizing too late that it is demeaning to Sam. Even so, it reveals her sense of superiority towards him.

e. "I'm sure what you're saying is very sound. But I accepted Chris and I intend to keep him."
Accustomed to having people listen to her rather than question her judgment, Tess ignores what the children's home director has told her about what is good for Chris. Again, this comment shows how Tess makes this conversation about her, not about Chris.

Conclude the activity and lesson by discussing what Sam tells Tess about her award: *"The outstanding woman of the year isn't a woman at all."* Is Sam being truthful or is he being intentionally mean-spirited in order to hurt Tess as she has hurt him? Encourage deeper discussion by asking students how they define womanhood. Must all women be responsible and devoted mothers? Can an intelligent career woman like Tess also succeed at being a wife and mother? These are some of the issues relative to gender roles that this film raises.

LESSON 3

The Comeuppance

If it is true, as many suggest, that Hollywood films repressed women and sought to teach them what they ought to do, then it is equally clear that, in order to achieve this, the movies first had to bring to life the opposite of their own morality. To convince women that marriage and motherhood were the right path, movies had to show women making the mistake of doing something else.

—JEANINE BASINGER, *A WOMAN'S VIEW: HOW HOLLYWOOD SPOKE TO WOMEN, 1930 – 1960*

ACTIVITY E: VOWS

ENGAGE

PPT **Display and discuss PPT slide 16: "And Then In My Spare Time . . ."** Encourage students to analyze the composition of this cartoon, created for the Office of War Information in 1943. Is this a positive or negative depiction of women? What do you think was the purpose of this cartoon? *Overall, the depiction is positive, showing two women working to build a war ship. The woman on the right wears a welder's helmet and holds, in addition to her welding tool, a baby. Four additional young children surround her. The subtext, pertinent to the historical period, is that a woman can do both a man's job and a woman's job, especially during wartime.*

Share this additional information with students. The Office of War Information (OWI) was a government agency created in 1942 with the objective of creating support on the home front for the war effort. This included persuading women that they should leave the private sphere for the public by working in jobs typically held by men. This cartoon seeks to persuade women that they could do this work without neglecting their families.

> **ASK:** In what way does this cartoon relate to *Woman of the Year?*
> *The movie raises the question of what is a woman and what are her responsibilities. Should her priorities be her husband and children over her career? Women in the audience watching Tess succeed in the public sphere might have applauded her efforts, or perhaps some applauded Sam's searing comment that Tess's lack of compassion for her husband and adopted son makes her less of a woman. Accept all reasonable responses.*

EXPLAIN & EXPLORE

Screen *Woman of the Year*: "Cold Comfort" (chapters 20 – 23 on a DVD of the film).

PPT Discussion questions appear on **PPT slides 17 and 18.**

GUIDED DISCUSSION

1. As this segment begins, the film focuses on Tess in her office, then cuts to Sam in his office. How would you describe what each character is thinking in these shots? Provide details to support your response.
   Both are attempting to work. Tess seems distracted, gazes out the window; Sam pulls a sheet of paper from the typewriter and crumples it. Both are upset.

2. What tactics does Tess use to try and win Sam back? Why do you think these tactics, which had worked previously, are no longer effective?
   She tells him to come up to her office and then, when he has obviously refused, she tells him she'll be right down. Once in, she sits close to him, urges him to come with her to Connecticut. She encourages him to kiss her. He does, but then walks out. Answers will vary as to why her tactics of cozying up to him do not work. Some may suggest he has realized that he will always be second in line behind her job, that even if they fix this fight, there will be another.

3. Summarize briefly the vows Tess hears during her father's marriage to Ellen. Then comment on how this scene contrasts with Tess and Sam's wedding ceremony earlier in the film.
   The vows focus on the devotion of two people to one another, sharing each other's joys and sorrows, and believing in each other to the end. The scene of Tess and Sam's wedding only showed the justice of the peace pronouncing them husband and wife. No vows were stated.

4. As the wedding vows are being spoken, one of the shots is a close-up of Tess. What do you think is the purpose of this shot?
   The cinematography allows the audience to read her reaction, to see the tears in her eyes. The close-up suggests that Tess is not just hearing the vows, but really listening to them and applying them to her own failed marriage.

5. Explain Sam's angry response when Tess tells him she plans to give up her job.
   Answers will vary but should focus on the main idea that he knows a woman of her intelligence and abilities would not be happy as only his wife. Whereas Tess finds operating a coffee pot and a waffle maker a challenge, he understands that what makes her Tess Harding are the political intrigues and debates. His anger may be that he knows if she did give up her job, she would be miserable and resent him for it.

6. What, if anything, did you find amusing during the breakfast scene? Provide reasoning for your response.
   Answers will vary. Accept all reasonable responses.

Think more about it. Does Sam enjoy seeing Tess struggle in the kitchen? Why does he accept her back?
Answers will vary. He certainly is amused. At the time the film was released, moviegoers debated the ending. Obviously, the two people still love one another. The ending suggests that Tess is beginning to understand Sam's point of view, beginning to see the world not solely through her own eyes.

Share this information with students. The film initially had a different ending, one that did not include coffee pots, waffle irons, and toasters. In this original ending, a role reversal of a different sort occurs. No, Tess does not leave the public sphere to be a wife and mother in the private sphere. Rather, she attempts to cover a sporting event and write about it, in a sense switching roles with Sam. Sam, meanwhile, attempts to learn a foreign language in an effort to fit better in Tess's world. Reportedly, actor Katherine Hepburn loved this ending.

As the story goes, however, the film received a lukewarm reception in early test releases. Reportedly, audiences of 1942 found Tess Harding too beautiful, too perfect to be believable or even likeable. To improve audience reception of the movie, the producer and director (rather than the screenwriters), drafted the kitchen chaos scene. Audiences loved seeing Tess get her comeuppance. One industry news article at the time stated that Katherine Hepburn was "furious" over the new ending, the one used in the final cut.



Screen then discuss "Deleted Scenes" (Module 4 Supplemental Clip Reel). In this short clip, author and journalist Claudia Roth Pierpont discusses how the original ending differed from the ending that makes the final cut.

> **ASK:** Which ending would have been more enjoyable for you?

Conclude the lesson with a debate over the film's ending. Share the quote below from film critic Stephanie Zacharek.

> *Audiences then weren't ready to deal with a woman character they didn't find soft enough, approachable enough, likeable enough—and today, too, a woman with Tess's confidence and expertise is often seen as a threat.*
>
> —STEPHANIE ZACHAREK, WRITING IN 2017

> **ASK:** Do you agree or disagree with this point of view—that Tess was not soft or likeable and that strong female characters remain a threat, even today? Provide reasoning to support your response.

WRITING EXTENSION—Opinion Essay

Review the introductory lesson to this module and the description of the woman's film genre. Then write a short essay answering this question: In what way, if at all, does *Woman of the Year* fit the description of a woman's film? Consider not only Tess's career but also the choices she makes. What is her sacrifice? Or has she sacrificed nothing at all? Conclude your essay by stating what you believe this movie was telling women viewers of the 1940s. Cite specific examples from the movie to support your viewpoint.

Teacher's note: *The movie's representation of women is not focused on patriotism or the war effort. The war figures somewhat in the plot, in that there are political figures who flee Europe and children who have been orphaned. But the film's focus is on the relationship between men and women, career and marriage. Tess's independent and feisty career-oriented aunt expresses sorrow at not having made time for love and family. She is in a sense cautioning Tess not to make the same mistake. The ending, in particular, with Tess fumbling and failing in the kitchen, suggests the film is a cautionary tale.*