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## Beyond The Lines: Hills Like White Elephants

The couple in Ernest Hemingway's 'Hills Like White Elephants', are faceless characters that become faced with what can be a life-changing situation. Their unplanned pregnancy becomes the topic for debate and whether they should keep it. The problem escalates passive-aggressively when it becomes clear that Jig wants to stay pregnant while the American man refuses to settle. What Hemingway lets the readers see is an exposed conversation of the two trying to come to a conclusion. We are never able to learn what they decide. "Hills Like White Elephants" is an expressive story on how communication barriers can impact decision making. Therefore, the story is told based on the choices that are on the table and how their lack of communication skills affect the choice of the couple.

Beyond the lines of Hills like White Elephants, the tone at first glance is what sets how the structure will turn out. It begins with the narration being completely controlled. The story consists mostly of dialogue between the American man and Jig. Besides the conversations between the couple, the reader knows nothing about the characters or their relationship outside of the dialogue. During the couple's interactions, there is no argument and no love shown other than a powerful conversation. Both characters cannot seem to move forward to discuss what it is they want and why creating a communication barrier. Their absence of agreement on the unborn baby has controlled them until the story comes to an end. Hemingway is known for his clean-cut writing talent. He writes his stories with straightforward dialogue. Although the couple's conversation may seem emotionless, if you look closely, you can reveal what emotion is trying to surface. The not so happily ever after comes to an end when the American man asks Jig if she is okay, knowing she is not. The narrator quotes the couple, "Do you feel better?" he asked. "I feel fine. There's nothing wrong with me I'm fine" she said" (200). Jig's final words interpret that she is not okay at all but attempts to pretend she doesn't know what he is referring to. Their failure to communicate leads to an unresolved ending and decision about abortion.

There is a deficiency of information about the two main characters. We don't know where this couple is traveling from or what they look like and how they ended up in this situation. What we can interpret from the story provided is that these are two completely different people. A few things I took note of is that Jig is a pregnant woman that is educated on abortions, doesn't want to have an abortion, is young enough to be called a girl, and drinks beer. We are given the impression that she is a developing character. After becoming pregnant at a young age, she lets the reader know that she wants to stay committed to her choice and tells us why. To give up the baby for adoption or have an abortion is simply not the answer for Jig. Since the story is based in 1922, both options were out of the question. The tradition in the early days was to get married and have a baby together that can be raised with both parents. In this case, getting married doesn't mean they'll live a happy life together and getting an abortion doesn't mean that they will not be happy. The American man makes his point extremely clear that he doesn't necessarily desire to get married and Jig makes it known that she refuses to get rid of the baby. She states, "Then I'll do it because I don't care about me" (199). In other words, she is saying that if she did truly care about her well being, she would not have the abortion. Although Jig is growing throughout the conversation, we can see that her boyfriend is not. He becomes a static character in this situation because he refuses to change his mind and tries to convince Jig to

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make the abortion happen. A few things we know about his character is that he doesn't want to marry Jig but is willing to do so and doesn't think abortion is a big deal. Because Jig and the American cannot come to a mutual agreement, this has created discomfort and psychological conflict.

The couples struggle to communicate on different viewpoints becomes dependent on what the next step to their relationship will be. They have hit a big bump in their relationship that is now a disaster. Hemingway's theme of communication and choices correlate perfectly within the story. Jim and the American are placed at a train station where they are at a literal crossroads of where to go next. The two are waiting for a train in the excruciating heat of Spain where they are forced to come to a decision. To give in to each other's wants and needs are at stake here. Although we do not get the reveal of their final decision, it becomes the drive of the narrative. The American went back and forth, "What did you say?" "I said we could have everything." "We can have everything." "No, we can't." (199). The couple struggle with communication breakdown and threatens the bond they have. There is also a lack of attention that the American has. Jig made a comment about the hills that resemble white elephants and get ignored. She repeats herself, "I said the mountain looks like white elephants, wasn't that bright?" (198). She continues to complain about how all they do is try new things and look at things. The struggle to communicate continues, "They're lovely hills, they don't really look like white elephants, I just meant the coloring of their skin through the trees". He responds, "Should we have another drink?" (198). She is struggling to stay interested in their lifestyle and is frustrated that the American man isn't paying attention to her. They are on two completely different pages in their lives and that causes strain on their communication. When that becomes affected, so do their choices.

The railroad tracks are the most important symbol that represents the story's themes of language and decision making. These tracks run next to each other, never meeting at one point to connect. Both tracks can signify a different path. The American and Jig are having drinks at this train station while waiting for the train that will take them to Spain. People tend to wait at airports, bus stations or train stations, to go onto the next step in their life. Figuratively, the troubled couple is discussing whether what path to take next while on a time crunch of the progressing pregnancy. Hemingway continues to introduce another setting symbol that represents the light and darkness of the abortion. Based on the location of the train station, there are no trees closeby to supply shade. The sun's beaming heat on the setting suggests how the couples' mindsets are different. According to Jig, the appearance of the hills look like white elephants in the daytime, while the rural land resembles a desert. The hills and shadowless land may signify Jig's thoughts of keeping the baby. The desert countryside may also symbolize the American's thoughts of continuing abortion. Eventually, Jig becomes fed up with his pressure and stands in direct sunlight. Yet he continues to stay seated in the darkness of the shade and tries to convince her to come to sit with him in attempt to pressure her once again.

Both the man and woman are caught in a tense circumstance trying to hopelessly avoid the "white elephant" in the room. From the American's perspective, the hills certainly do not resemble white elephants. However, Jig has stepped away from his reality and into her vision of what the future could be. This creates frustration within the two when at a literal crossroad. Hemingway uses his short story skills to create a dialogue based tale with hidden symbolism. It forces readers to read through the simple lines of "Hills Like White Elephants". Because of Jig's desire to keep her baby and the American's want for a life of freedom, they find

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themselves struggling to look past communication barriers that affect further choices.

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