

- Is the characters' language formal or informal?
- Do characters speak in dialect? Do they have accents?
- Is the characters' language plain or elaborate?
- Do different characters use different kinds of language? What is the significance of these differences?
- How does language reveal characters' emotional states?
- Does the tone of any character's language change significantly as the play progresses? What does this change reveal?
- Does the play include verbal irony? dramatic irony? How is irony conveyed? What purpose does irony achieve?
- What is revealed about the characters through what others say about them?
- What is revealed about characters through their actions?
- What is revealed about characters through the play's stage directions?
- How might different actors' interpretations change an audience's understanding of the characters?



Robert Miller/ZUMA Press/Newscom

PAUL DOOLEY (1928–) and **WINNIE HOLZMAN** (1954–) are a husband-and-wife playwriting team. Dooley was the co-creator and head writer of the 1970s children's television series *The Electric Company*. He has acted in numerous television shows and films, including *Grace under Fire* (1993), *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1993), *Breaking Away* (1979), and *Sixteen Candles* (1984). Holzman wrote the book for the Broadway hit *Wicked* (2003), which was nominated for a 2004 Tony Award. An actor and a screenwriter for numerous television shows, Holzman received a 1995 Emmy Award nomination for writing the television series *My So-Called Life* (1994).



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Cultural Context: The Post-it® brand changed the way Americans write and reminders. In 1980, Post-it launched the sticky note as a new consumer product. Initially intended for business use, Post-its quickly became a national household staple. Post-it's Web site touts the product's literal and figurative power, pointing out, for example, that a Post-it stuck to an evacuated home for three days during Hurricane Hugo in 1989. Since popularizing sticky notes more than thirty years ago, Post-it has created a wide range of related products including digital notes.

Post-its (Notes on a Marriage) (1998)

Written by
husband
(W)

Post-its (Notes on a Marriage) premiered at a benefit performance for the Gilda Radner Cancer Fund, 1998. The cast was as follows:

ACTOR Paul Dooley
ACTRESS Winnie Holzman

There is a chair with a small table and a glass of water on either side of the stage, a la A.R. Gurney's *Love Letters*. The Actor and Actress enter simultaneously from either wing, dressed simply. Each grasps a handful of Post-its as if it were a script. They sit, mutually acknowledging each other and the audience. Each takes out a pair of reading glasses and puts them on. The Actor lifts his first Post-it to begin. . . and reads. Every line is read from a Post-it.

ACTOR: Had an early meeting, couldn't bear to wake you. Close front door hard or it won't lock. PS: Last night was incredible. I'm still

ACTRESS: Helped myself to breakfast. You need milk. PS: Next time, wake me.

ACTOR: Hey, sleepyhead. Tried to wake you. Not easy. Left you some coffee, hope you like it black. } don't feel

ACTRESS: Thought I should spend at least one night this week at my place. Picked up some milk; you don't have to pay me back.

ACTOR: Off to work, extra set of keys on hall table. — Commitment

ACTRESS: Darling: Went jogging with Lila. If you go out, we need milk. Wow. I can't believe we're a "we"!

ACTOR: Hon: If you have time, could you pick up my shirts? Ticket on hall table. Thanks. PS: Milk.

ACTRESS: Shirts are in your closet. Your mother called. She seemed surprised to hear my voice. You obviously never mentioned me. (Icy) Your shirts came to me thirteen-fifty. I'm so

ACTOR: Gone to florist. Back soon. Hope you liked the chocolates. } surprise

ACTRESS: Darling, don't go in the den. } I'm so

ACTOR: Sweetheart, I understand how much it means to you, but at this stage of our relationship I'm just not ready. . . to have a dog.

ACTRESS: (After a beat.) We need Milk-Bones. (Next Post-it.) Your mother called; call her (Next Post-it.) Did you call your mother? (Next Post-it.) Went to lunch with your mother. Back soon.

ACTOR: Your new best friend my mother called. Call her.

ACTRESS: We need milk. Also, your mom mentioned how much you hate Eugene. I don't think Eugene's so bad. You should hear my middle name. Thank God my mother's dead! } a

ACTOR: Please do not mention the name Eugene to me ever again. Thank you.

ACTRESS: Shopping list: Pistachio ice cream. Sardines. Those tiny little cheeses that come in that cute little net bag. . . They're so adorable, they make me cry. } Ch

commitment

commitment

ACTRESS: We need Pampers. And baby wipes. And we need to get married.
ACTOR: Meet me City Hall, six sharp. You bring old and borrowed; I'll do new and blue. Mom will stay with Eugenia. *baby girl*
ACTRESS: Note to self: Find breast pump.
ACTOR: Take cold shower. *frustrations*
ACTRESS: Lose forty pounds.
ACTOR: Redirect sex drive into career. (Next Post-it.) Home late. Don't wait up.
ACTRESS: Hey, stranger, if you're not too busy, could you call Eugenia tonight, around bedtime? Just to see if she recognizes your voice? *Sarcasm*
ACTOR: Hon: Sorry about your birthday. PS: I got the raise!
ACTRESS: To the new vice president in charge of marketing. We need milk. Please advise.
ACTOR: Hon: I think we're out of milk. (Next Post-it.) Still no milk!
ACTRESS: If you want it so bad, get it yourself. The milk train doesn't stop here anymore. *to visit*
ACTOR: If you can't even manage to get to the store—get some household help!
ACTRESS: (Icy.) Have gone to bed. Dinner is in fridge. If there is something in particular you wish for dinner tomorrow night, please leave note to that effect, and I will have Ursula or Carla or Jose, if it's heavy, pick it up. (Beat.) I can't take this anymore! We barely—
Turns Post-it over.—communicate! There's got to be more to this marriage than a hastily scribbled words on a small square of pastel paper! (Beat.) By the way, we're at Post-its.
ACTOR: You think I want to spend every night at the office? You have absolutely no concept of how a business is run.
ACTRESS: To Whom It May Concern: Regarding your Post-it of June the tenth, allow me to clarify my position—up yours. Eugenia and I will be at your mother's. PS: You need milk.
the Actor glances over at the Actress, she sips her water, coolly avoids his gaze. Finally.
ACTOR: Call her at my mothers. (Next Post-it.) Must call her. (Next Post-it.) Reminder: Take out garbage. Call her. (Next Post-it.) People to call: Her.
the Actor looks over again at the Actress. She continues to ignore him.
ACTOR: Shopping list: Small loaf bread. Half pint milk. Soup for one. (Next Post-it.) Scotch for one. (Next Post-it.) Inflatable doll. (Next Post-it.) Scotch for two.
the Actress looks at him. He catches her eye. Caught, she hastily looks away.
ACTOR: Things to tell her. ~~That I'm sorry. That I miss her.~~ That all I want—all I ever wanted—for her to be happy.
the Actress turns to him, touched by this. Then. . . takes the next Post-it. Reads.
ACTRESS: We need milk.
ACTOR: Dearest—have gone down to the end of the driveway to get the paperback soon.

ACTRESS: Honey, that therapist called back. He can see you Monday.
ACTOR: Sweetie, your therapist says your Tuesday is now Friday.
ACTRESS: What a session! Dr. K. believes that part of me is locked in unconscious competition with you, and envious of your of masculine role. By the way, we need cucumbers, sausages, and a really big zucchini. *lol*
ACTOR: At last—a breakthrough today with Dr. G. It all became crystal clear. My mother. My father. His mother. You. Your mother. (Turns Post-it over, continues,) I see our entire marriage in a new light! I must free myself from the past so we can truly have a future. This changes everything. *Sarcasm*
ACTRESS: Hon: A Diet Coke exploded all over that note you left. Hope it wasn't important. *Funny*
He stares at her. Oblivious to his reaction, she reads the next Post-it.
Took Eugenia to Brownies. Back soon.
ACTOR: Took Eugenia to kickboxing. Back soon.
ACTRESS: Took Eugenia to therapy. Could be a while. *lol*
ACTOR: Someone named Olaf called. Needs your résumé. What résumé?
ACTRESS: I landed the job! I start Monday! (Next Post-it.) Last-minute meeting. I'll try to call. (Next Post-it.) I'll be working late, don't wait up. (Next Post-it;) I'm glad you waited. Last night was incredible. *independent town space & life*
ACTOR: Drove Eugenia to DMV. Hope she doesn't drive me home.
ACTRESS: Eugenia called. Loves college. Mentioned someone named Tyrone. Doesn't miss us at all. *baby's driving*
ACTOR: Pick up travel brochures.
ACTRESS: Eugenia called. When can we meet Tyrone?
ACTOR: Schedule trip to campus when we get back.
ACTRESS: Sweetheart: Travel agent called. Cruise is confirmed! ~~The honeymoon we never had!~~ A time for us to leave all this behind and enjoy ten glorious days of total togetherness.
A long, silent beat. Very long. Very silent. They both look straight ahead. Finally he lifts the next Post-it.
ACTOR: (With great relief.) God, it's good to be home! (Next Post-it.) Dinner Wednesday with Eugenia and what's-his-name.
ACTRESS: Tyrone called—it's a boy. Kareem Eugene. *Grand Son*
ACTOR: Eugenia called. Loves being a mom.
ACTRESS: Off to throw pots! Back soon! (Next Post-it) Don't forget—we're bird-watching Thursday! (Next Post-it.) What night is good for square dancing? *older activities*
ACTOR: Any night you want—we're free! Nothing to tie us down.
ACTOR: Eugenia called. Could we take Kareem for the weekend?
ACTRESS: Tyrone called. Could we take Kareem for spring break?
ACTOR: Kareem called. Could he spend the summer with us? Again. (Next Post-it,) Took Kareem to DMV.
ACTRESS: Honey—last night was incredible. I couldn't believe how long it went on. You've got to do something about your snoring. *lol*

ACTOR: Shopping list: Bengay, Dentucreme. Viagra.

ACTRESS: Wrinkles Away. I-Can't-Believe-It's-Support-Hose. Estrogen in a Drug

ACTOR: We need milk of magnesia.

ACTRESS: Call Medicare.

ACTOR: You left your keys in the door again.

ACTRESS: Do you have my keys?

ACTOR: I can't find my glasses.

ACTRESS: Have you seen my cane?

ACTOR: How can I see your cane if I can't find my glasses?

ACTRESS: Gone for walk.

ACTOR: Where are you? Next time you go out, leave me a note!

ACTRESS: Sweetheart—dinner in oven. Taking nap. Love ya.

There's a pause as lights slowly fade on the Actress. Then. . .

ACTOR: Call Emily. Also cousin Ruthie. Send note to Father McKay and everyone who sent flowers. (Beat.) The service was lovely. Everybody said so. (Beat.) I was looking through your things for that locket you said Eugenia should have. I could hardly believe what I found. You'd saved every Post-it I ever wrote you. I wish I saved yours. I could be reading them now. (Beat.) Back soon. Going to the store. We need milk.

END OF PLAY

Reading and Reacting

1. Summarize the plot of *Post-its*. What actually happens in this play?
2. What events occur offstage? Identify the references to these events in the character dialogue.
3. Read the stage direction at the beginning of the play. What information about the characters do you get from these stage directions?
4. What facts are revealed in the course of the play about the two characters? What more do you infer about them?
5. In this play, the actors read every line from Post-it notes. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this format?
6. What props are used in this play? What purpose does each prop serve? If you were staging this play, would you use any additional props?
7. Do you think the fact that this play has only two speaking parts is a handicap? Can you suggest a way to add other characters while retaining to the "post-it" format? What other characters do you think could have speaking parts?
8. How much time passes in the course of this play? How can you tell?
9. Do the two characters grow and change over the years? Does their relationship grow and change? Explain.
10. Why is the reference to needing milk repeated over and over again? Is this an effective use of repetition, or does it become annoying? Explain.

11 **JOURNAL ENTRY** Write a series of 140-character text messages between this play's characters, using shorthand and abbreviations as needed. (If you like, you can "translate" the play's post-it messages into text messages.) Does the change of format change the conversation? If so, how?

12 **CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE** Savanna Dooley, a screenwriter who is also Holzman's daughter, describes Holzman's book for the musical *Wicked* as "rich with her trademarks: a story about an outsider, fully realized characters, and subversive political commentary." Does *Post-its* also demonstrate Holzman's trademarks as described by Dooley?

Related Works: "Hills Like White Elephants" (p. 129), "Love and Other (Lies) on the Tape" (p. 138), "The Story of an Hour" (p. 205), "Meeting at Night" (p. 905), "Morning" (p. 905), "How Do I Love Thee?" (p. 905), *The Brute* (p. 1068)



Source: ©AP Photo/Alan Solomon

DAVID AUBURN (1969–) was born in Chicago and grew up in Columbus, Ohio, and in Arkansas before returning to Chicago for college. He spent time in Los Angeles on a screenwriting fellowship, then moved to New York to become a playwright. He enrolled in the playwriting program at Juilliard and had his first full-length play, *Skyscraper* (1997), produced off-Broadway in 1997. The production attracted the attention of the Manhattan Theatre Club, which told Auburn, "Keep us in mind for your next play and send it to us." He did, and that play was *Proof*, a Broadway production. *Proof* was awarded the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the 2001 Tony Award; Auburn also received a Dramatists Guild's Hull-Warriner Award for *Proof* (which was adapted into the 2005 feature film of the same name). His other plays include *Fifth Plan* (1998) and *The Next Life*. His short play *What Do You Believe about the Future?* (1998) was published in *Play* magazine and was adapted for the screen. Auburn also wrote the screenplay for the film *The Lake House*, and for the 2007 feature film *The Girl in the Park* (which he also directed). Winner of the Joseph Kesselring Prize for drama, Auburn has also received the Helen F. McKim Award and a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship.

Cultural Context *Proof* is a play about mathematics, traditionally a male-dominated field. The number of women in mathematics has grown slowly but steadily in the last thirty years. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2011 Statistical Abstract, since 2000, women are earning more bachelor's degrees than men in science and engineering fields from colleges and universities in the United States. The percentage of American women earning PhDs in science and engineering has also risen, approaching forty percent. Despite these gains, the notion that women are less capable in math and science is still not universally accepted. In January 2005, Dr. Lawrence Summers of Harvard University, hypothesized that innate genetic differences between men and women were the reason why "fewer women succeed in math and science careers." These comments—framed as a lecture at a prestigious university—sparked international controversy.