CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

Herland

Charlotte Perkins Gilman · *1915 · original English text*

This is written from memory, unfortunately. Three classmates—Terry, Jeff, and Vandyck Jennings, who tells the story—find a country of women and girl children, and must live there as guests, prisoners, and students. The hosted text is Gilman's original English, Project Gutenberg #32, complete.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What do three men from the outside world actually find in a country of women, and how should a school read a feminist utopia as the author wrote it, without treating the library as if it were announcing a program of its own?

"This is written from memory, unfortunately. If I could have brought with me the material I so carefully prepared, this would be a very different story."
opening

Herland is a thought-experiment and a story: a hidden land, a people of women, an order of child-rearing, work, and peace that the three visitors must explain to themselves. Terry will not be at home in it; Jeff is quickly at home; Van tries to understand. Teach the book as Gilman wrote it, for older students. Do not sensationalize, and do not conscript it into a later cause the 1915 text is not here to serve.

KEY CHARACTERS

Vandyck Jennings
The narrator, who writes from memory and tries to understand what he has seen

Terry O. Nicholson
The classmate who resists Herland, and who must be brought to a promise before they leave

Jeff Margrave
The classmate who is quickly at home, "naturalized" almost at once

Ellador
The woman of Herland with whom Van's later story is bound, and whose return is a condition of the promise

A REPORT FROM MEMORY

> *"This is written from memory, unfortunately. If I could have brought with me the material I so carefully prepared, this would be a very different story."*
> opening

> *"And he did. With which agreement we at last left Herland."*
> the close

Grades 9–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

Written from Memory

THE OPENING

Van, the narrator, has lost his notes. There were three of them: Terry O. Nicholson, Jeff Margrave, and Vandyck Jennings, classmates and friends, all interested in exploration.

- The first sentences are exact, including "unfortunately" and the lost material
- "There were three of us, classmates and friends--Terry O. Nicholson (we used to call him the Old Nick, with good reason), Jeff Margrave, and I, Vandyck Jennings."
- The book is a first-person report, not a manifesto printed in the library's voice
- The journey toward the rumored country follows

> *"This is written from memory, unfortunately. If I could have brought with me the material I so carefully prepared, this would be a very different story."*
> opening

02

A Country of Women

THE APPROACH, AND THE ARRIVAL

They have heard of a country where no men live—only women and girl children. They go to see. What they find is not a camp, but a cultivated land with its own history and order.

- The rumor is already in the early pages: "a country where no men lived--only women and girl children"
- The arrival should be read as exploration, not as a raid
- Gilman is inventing an order in order to judge the one the men have come from
- Keep the three visitors distinct; they will not see alike

03

Students in Herland

THE MIDDLE CHAPTERS

The men are received, confined, taught, and shown a society organized around motherhood, education, and a long peace. Van tries to understand; Jeff admires; Terry resists.

- The instruction of the three is much of the book; it is social thought in the form of a visit
- Ellador, Alima, and Celis belong to the later personal story
- Teach the utopia as an argument Gilman is making, and also as a story with characters who disagree
- Do not flatten Terry into a mere villain or Van into a mere spokesman

04

Leaving, and a Promise

THE CLOSE

They are asked to promise not to betray the location of the country until permission after Ellador's return. Jeff agrees at once. Van studies it and agrees. Terry will not, until he must.

- Terry's first protest is that he will get an expedition "to force an entrance into Ma-land." The book records the line
- The women say, quite calmly, that he must then remain a prisoner always
- He promises at last, "With which agreement we at last left Herland."
- Do not invent a conquest or a sequel ending this file does not give

> *"And he did. With which agreement we at last left Herland."*
> the close

05

The Hosted File, and How to Teach It

PG #32

The hosted text is complete, original English, 1915. A short novel, and a utopia, for older students.

- Teach it as Gilman wrote it. The library's hosting is not a later program
- The book is an argument about child-rearing, work, sex, and peace; handle the adult matter with tact
- It may be read with other early-twentieth-century utopias and dystopias, including The Iron Heel, as a contrast of imagined orders
- Quote the hosted wording, including the dashes in the early introductions

A Hidden Country · An Imagined Order · Motherhood and Education · Three Kinds of Guest · Peace and Force · A Promise

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. The opening is exact: "This is written from memory, unfortunately. If I could have brought with me the material I so carefully prepared, this would be a very different story."
2. The three visitors are Terry, Jeff, and Van. They will not see Herland alike. Keep them distinct.
3. Teach the book as Gilman wrote it, for older students, without sensation and without treating the library as if it were announcing a later program.
4. The close is a promise not to betray the country's location, and the sentence "With which agreement we at last left Herland." Terry is the obstacle; he promises at last.
5. The hosted text is complete, PG #32, original English, 1915.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #32, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/herland/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.