

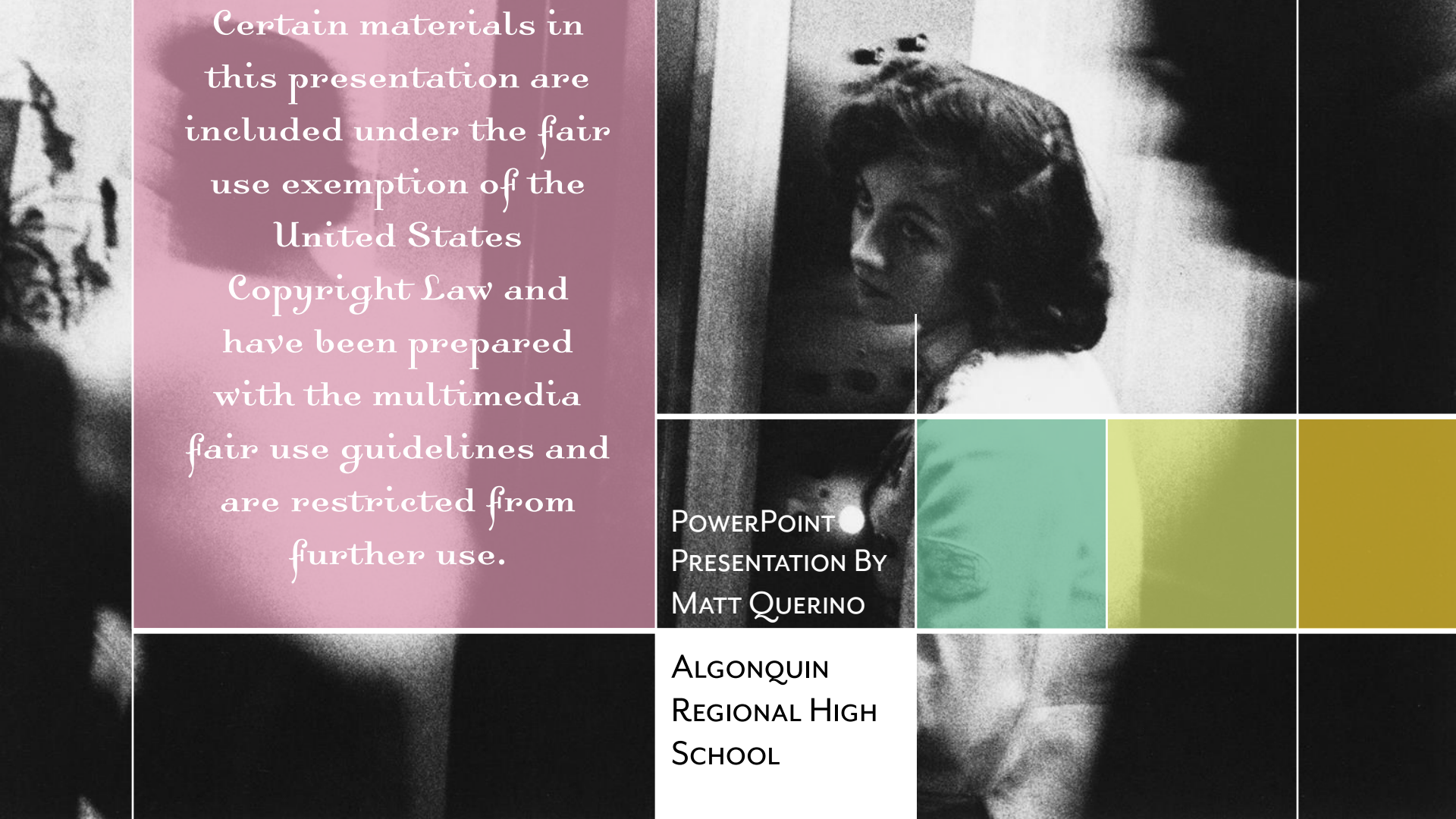
And what about the novel's larger relevance to today's young reader? At a time when Holden Caulfield's sensitivities seem unrelated to the hard edges of today's world for many readers, does *The Bell Jar* still have any meaning...

-FRANCES MCCULLOUGH, 1996

The Bell Jar

a Novel

BY SYLVIA PLATH



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POWERPOINT
PRESENTATION BY
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ALGONQUIN
REGIONAL HIGH
SCHOOL





When people look at my pictures I want them to feel the way
they do when they want to read a line of a poem twice.

-ROBERT FRANK



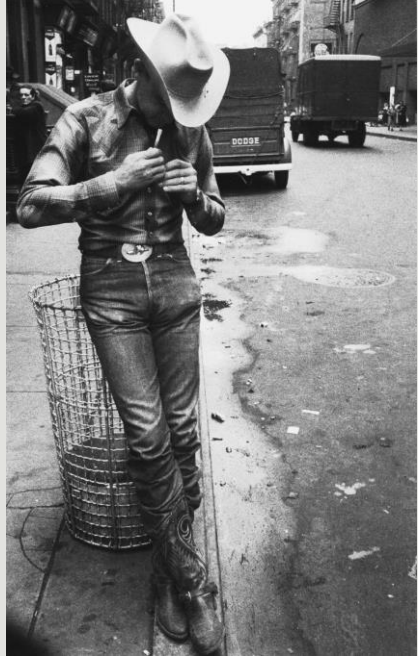


FIRST PUBLISHED in France in 1958, and in the United States in 1959, Robert Frank's book *The Americans* changed the course of 20th-century photography and helped the nation see itself more clearly. In 83 photographs, Frank looked beneath the surface of American life to reveal a people often plagued by racism, ill-served by their politicians, and rendered numb by a rapidly expanding consumer culture. Yet he also found new areas of beauty in overlooked corners of the country and in the process helped redefine the icons of America. In his photographs of diners, cars, and even the road itself, Frank pioneered a seemingly intuitive, immediate, off-kilter style that was as innovative as his subjects. Also groundbreaking was the way he tightly sequenced his photographs in *The Americans*, linking them thematically, conceptually, formally, and linguistically to present a haunting picture of mid-century America.



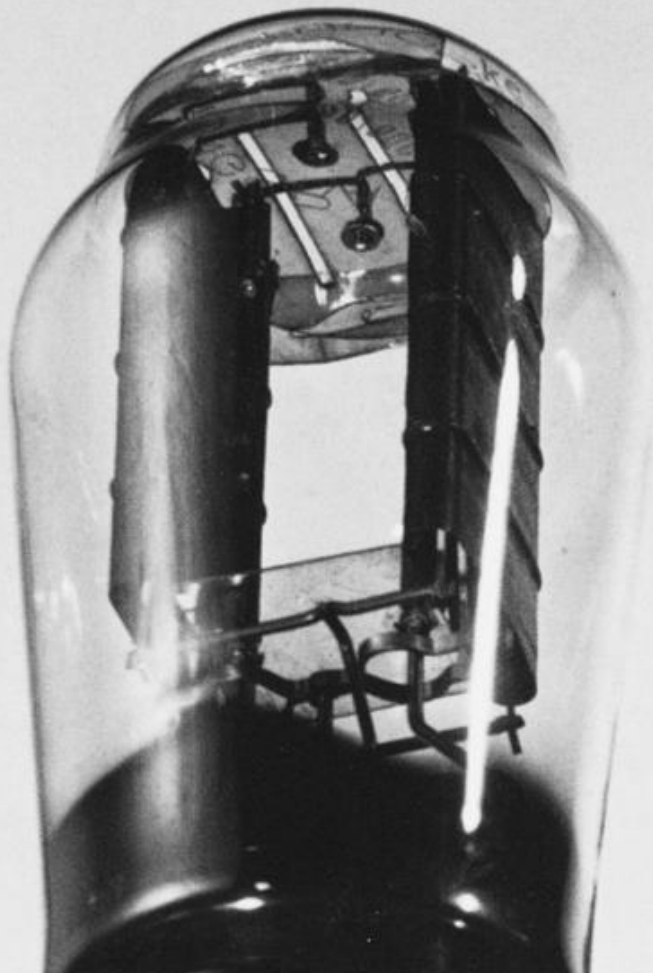
EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY

Choose one of Robert Frank's photographs from *The Americans* and write a short story (1-2 pages) about it. The story should contain a description of the scene and explain how the characters came to be there in that captured moment in time. The setting is 1950s America. Be creative and have fun with the assignment.





In September 1950 Sylvia Plath (1932-1963) entered Smith College in Northampton, MA, the largest women's college in the world. There, she continued to publish poems and stories, primarily for the magazine *Seventeen*, and won numerous prizes for her poetry. In August of 1951 she won *Mademoiselle* magazine's fiction contest and the following summer was chosen to be a guest editor for the magazine. Her experience writing in New York City that summer was reconstructed to form the beginning of her first, and only, novel. *The Bell Jar* was first published in January 1963, under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas. She had adopted the pen name for publication of the novel because she questioned its literary value; she was also worried about the pain publication might cause to the many people close to her whose personalities she had distorted and lightly disguised in the novel. The central themes of her early life are the basis for *The Bell Jar*.



“It had nothing to do with me, but I couldn’t help wondering what it would be like, being burned alive all along your nerves.”

EXTRA

RACE RESULTS **Los Angeles Times** PICTORIAL

CO. 1001 IN THREE PARTS 5 P.M. SATURDAY MORNING, JUNE 30, 1953 16 PAGES PAGE 10

ROSENBERGS DIE

Pair Executed for Atom Spying

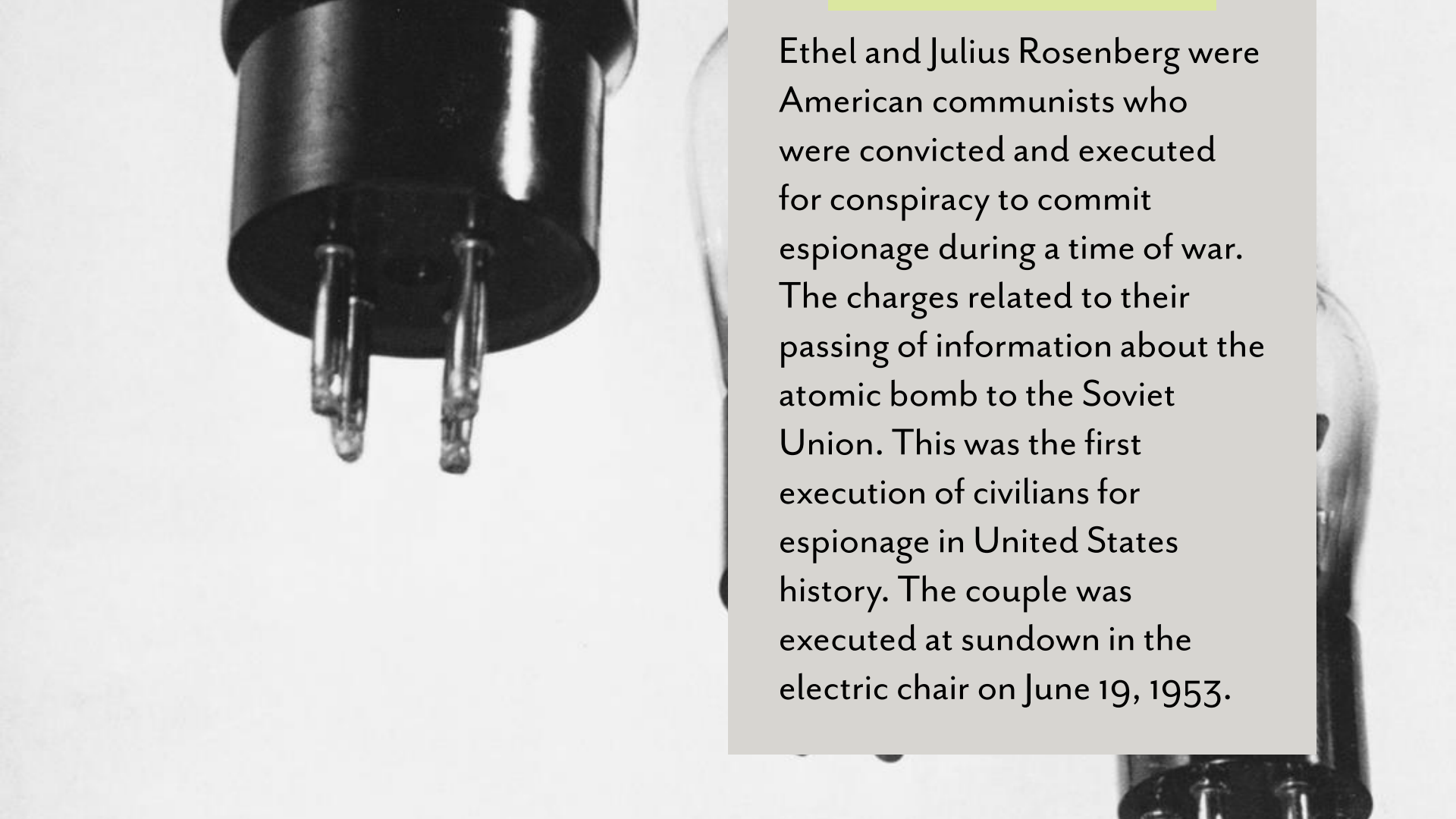



Supreme Court and Eisenhower Reject Couple's Last Pleas

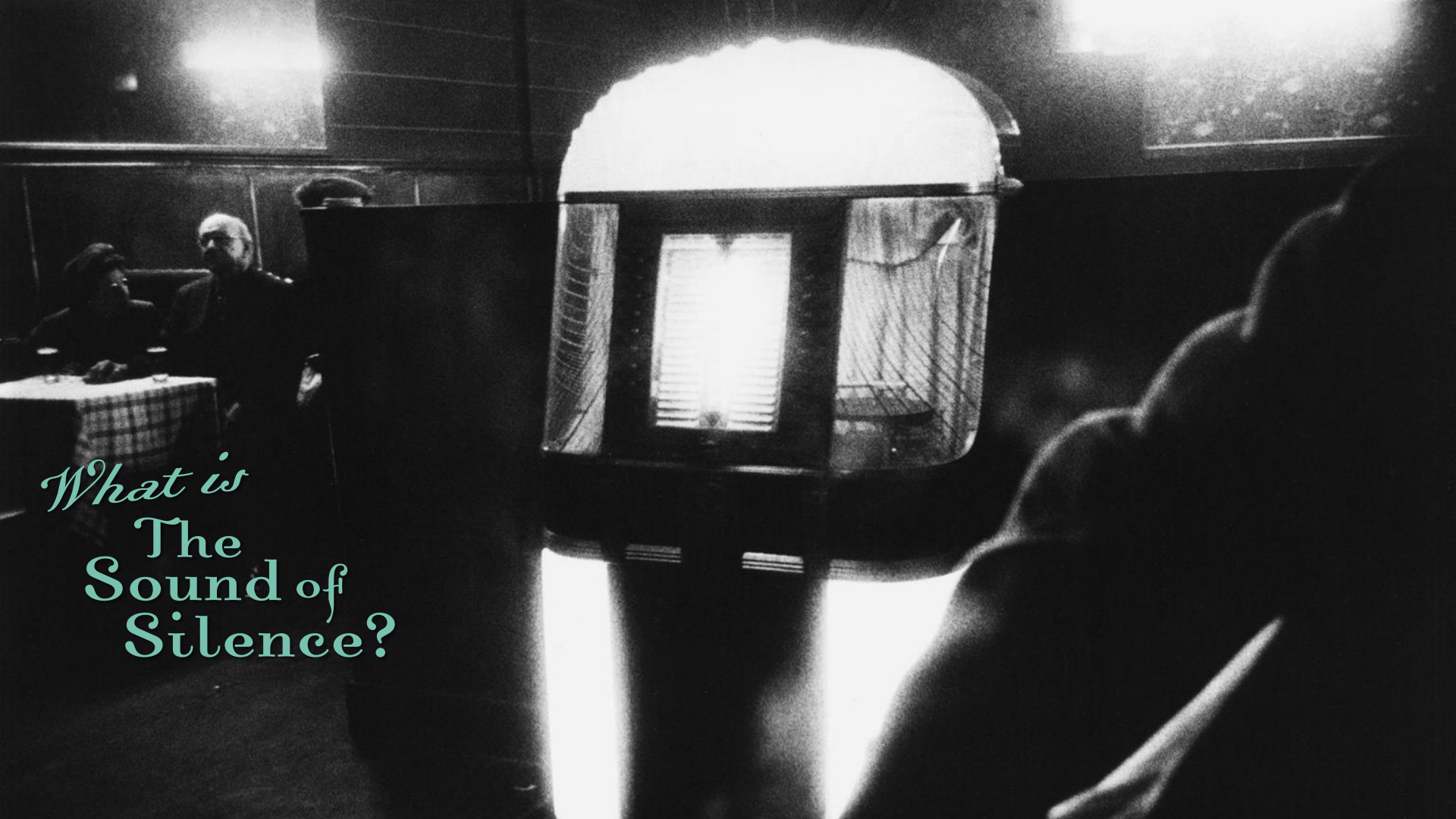
WASHINGTON, N.Y., June 30—Ethel and Julius Rosenberg died in Sing Sing prison today after a long and bitter struggle to stay alive. The Supreme Court on Monday rejected their last appeal for a stay of execution. The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday rejected the pleas of the Rosenbergs for a stay of execution. The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday rejected the pleas of the Rosenbergs for a stay of execution.

RECEIVED PRISONER, N.Y., June 29 (AP)— Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were ordered executed today after the Supreme Court rejected their last appeal for a stay of execution. The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday rejected the pleas of the Rosenbergs for a stay of execution.

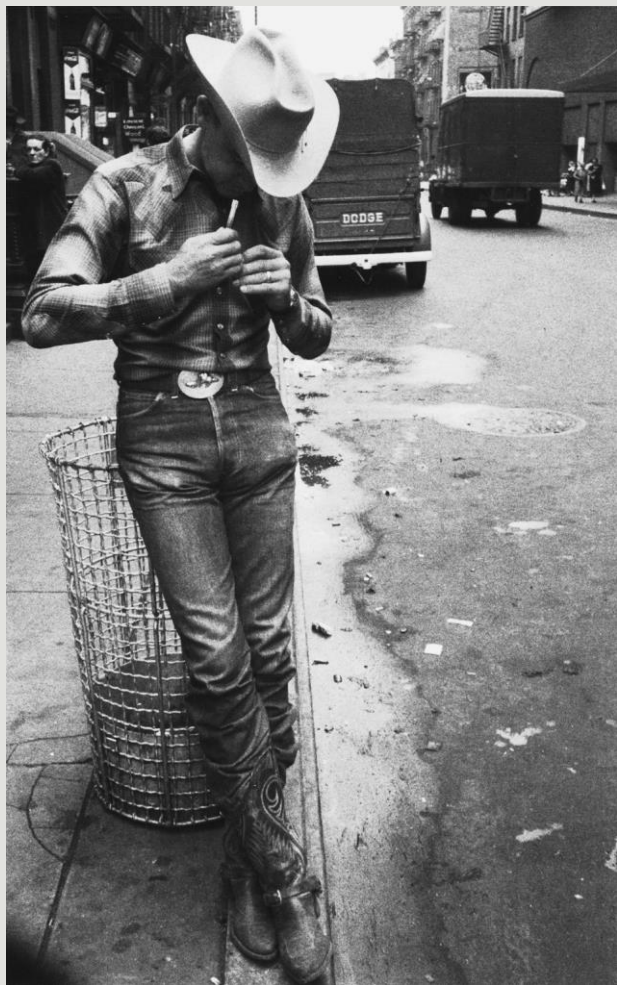
WEST BERLIN'S RED OFFICES WRECKED 20 Injured as Fireworks Blast
TRUCE DELEGATES FACE CRUCIAL TALK Clouds Clamp Cool Dampers as Summer News



Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were American communists who were convicted and executed for conspiracy to commit espionage during a time of war. The charges related to their passing of information about the atomic bomb to the Soviet Union. This was the first execution of civilians for espionage in United States history. The couple was executed at sundown in the electric chair on June 19, 1953.



What is
The
Sound of
Silence?



THE BELL JAR: CHAPTERS 1-4



“*The Bell Jar* sailed right onto the bestseller list in 1971 and despite some complaining reviews, it quickly established itself as a female rite-of-passage novel, a twin to *Catcher in the Rye*—a comparison first noted by one of the original British reviewers. In fact *The Bell Jar* was published on the twentieth anniversary of Salinger’s classic and Sylvia Plath herself was just two years older than the fictional hero, Holden Caulfield.”

-FRANCES McCULLOUGH, 1996

HOLDEN CAULFIELD

ESTHER GREENWOOD

Use the results of the Venn diagram to help you define what an anti-hero is in your own words.

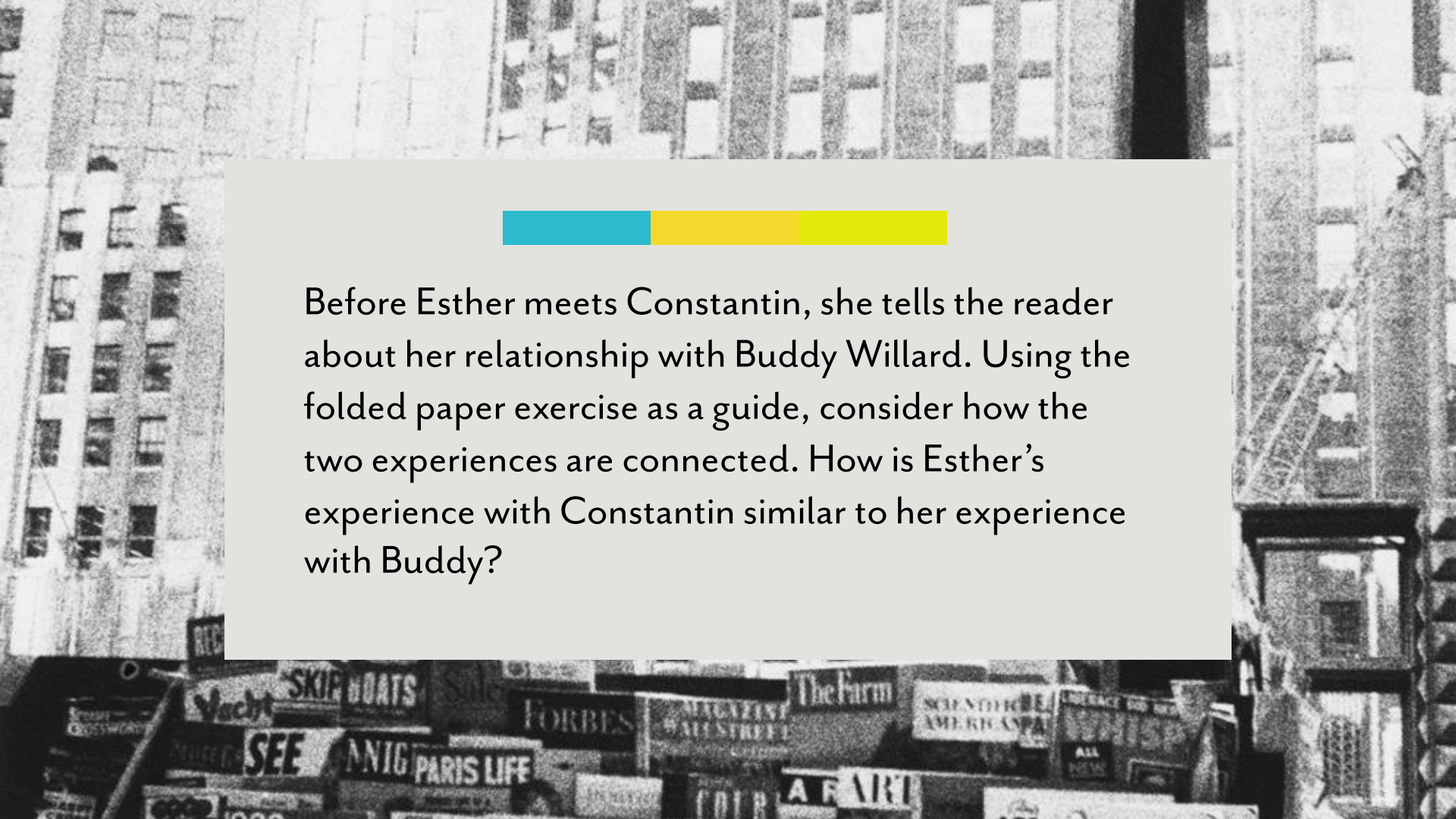


*I don't know just why my
successful evasion of chemistry
should have floated into my mind
there in Jay Cee's office.*



THE AUTHOR FREQUENTLY uses flashbacks to help develop the “present day” story line in the novel. The objective of this lesson is to examine the relationship between Esther’s flashbacks and the main story line.

1. Divide into small groups. Fold a piece of paper in half. On one side write notes about what happens with Esther at Jay Cee’s office in chapters 3 & 4. On the other side, write notes about Esther’s experience with science classes at college.
2. In your group, write the answers to the following questions: How is Esther’s experience with Jay Cee similar to her experience evading chemistry class? How is it different? What do the two have to do with each other? What do you think makes Esther think of the science class situation when she is in Jay Cee’s office? What does this tell us about Esther’s character?



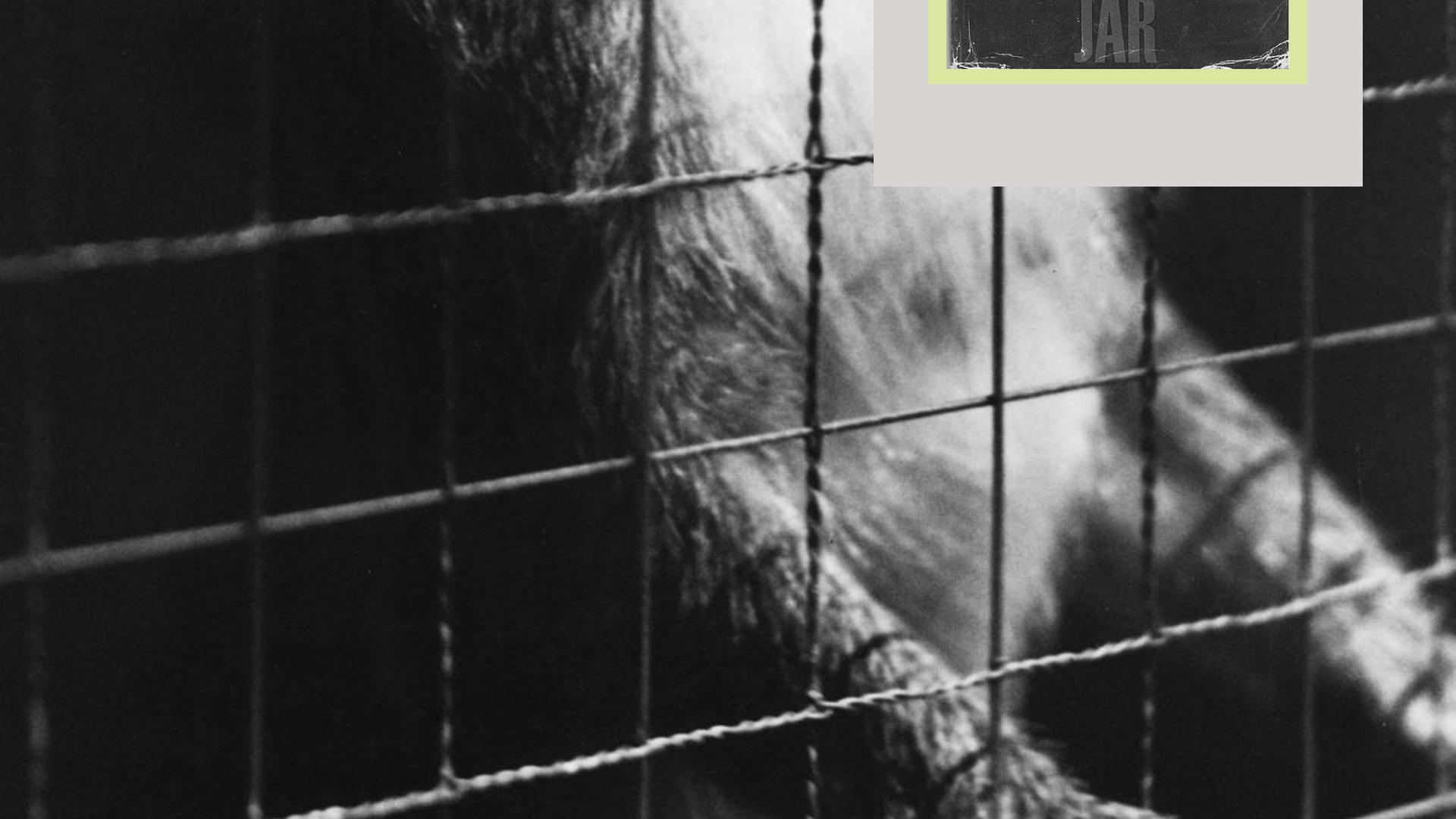
Before Esther meets Constantin, she tells the reader about her relationship with Buddy Willard. Using the folded paper exercise as a guide, consider how the two experiences are connected. How is Esther's experience with Constantin similar to her experience with Buddy?

THE BELL JAR: CHAPTERS 5-8



WHAT PROPS
WOULD YOU BE
PHOTOGRAPHED
WITH AND WHY?
BRIEFLY WRITE
YOUR OBJECTS
AND REASONS
DOWN IN YOUR
NOTEBOOK AND
BE PREPARED TO
SHARE WITH THE
CLASS.

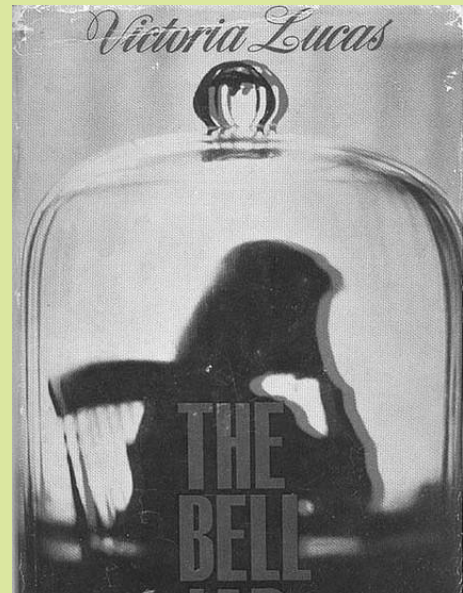
“Betsy held an ear of corn to show she wanted to be a farmer’s wife, and Hilda held the bald, faceless head of a hatmaker’s dummy to show she wanted to design hats, and Doreen held a gold-embroidered sari to show she wanted to be a social worker in India (she didn’t really, she told me, she only wanted to get her hands on a sari)” (101).



JAR



What is the primary meaning of the novel's titular bell jar?

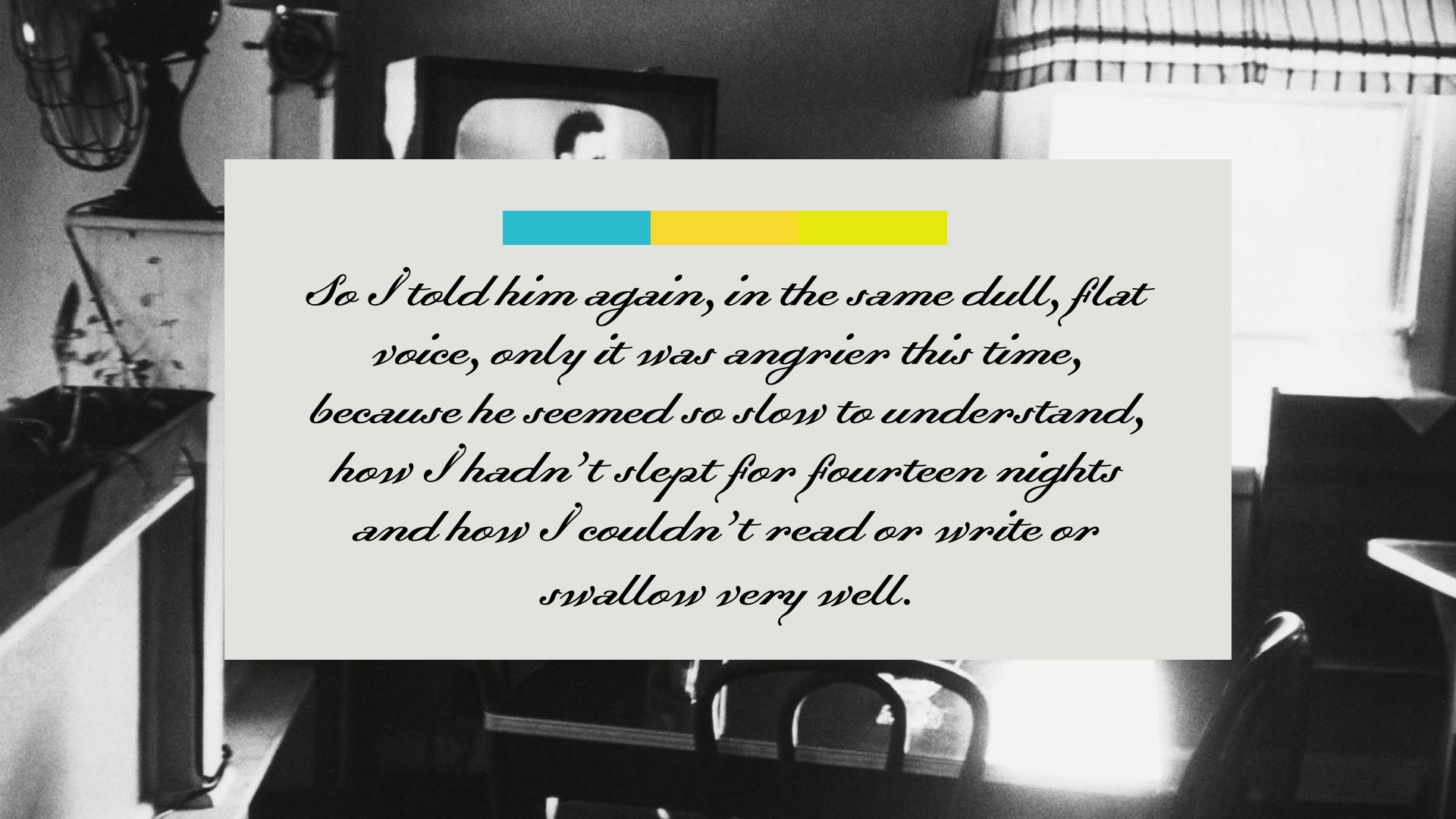



"I didn't really see why people should look at me" (113).

"I knew perfectly well the cars were making a noise, and the people in them and behind the lit windows of the buildings were making a noise."

"I had imagined a kind, ugly, intuitive man looking up and saying 'Ah!' in an encouraging way, as if he could see something I couldn't, and then I would find words to tell him how I was so scared, as if I were being stuffed farther and farther into a black, airless sack with no way out" (129).

"Ours was a small, white clapboard house set in the middle of a small green lawn on the corner of two peaceful suburban streets, but in spite of the little maple trees planted at intervals around our property, anybody passing along the sidewalk could glance up at the second story windows and see just what was going on" (115).

A black and white photograph of a room. In the background, a television set is visible, showing a person's face. To the left, there is a large, vintage-style electric fan. To the right, a window with horizontal blinds is partially open, letting in bright light. The overall atmosphere is that of a mid-20th-century domestic interior.


*So I told him again, in the same dull, flat
voice, only it was angrier this time,
because he seemed so slow to understand,
how I hadn't slept for fourteen nights
and how I couldn't read or write or
swallow very well.*



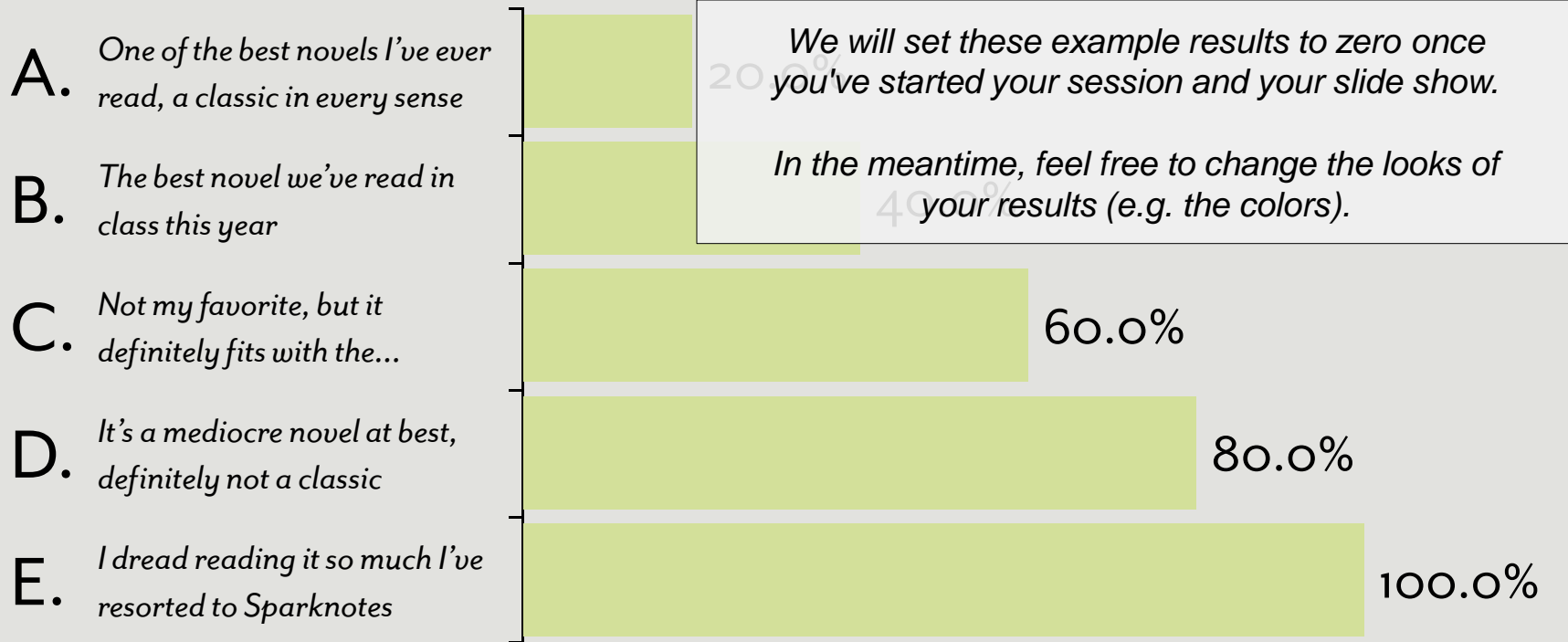
Prozac Nation, an autobiography published in 1994 and written by Elizabeth Wurtzel, describes the author's experiences with major depression, her own character failings and how she managed to live through particularly difficult periods while completing college and working as a writer. The book was adapted into an independent film of the same name starring Christina Ricci and released in 2001.

HOW DO YOU LIKE THE BELL JAR SO FAR?

- A. One of the best novels I've ever read, a classic in every sense
- B. The best novel we've read in class this year
- C. Not my favorite, but it definitely fits with the curriculum
- D. It's a mediocre novel at best, definitely not a classic
- E. I dread reading it so much I've resorted to Sparknotes

votes: 0

How Do You Like The Bell Jar So Far?





THE BELL JAR: CHAPTERS 9-12

*"Somehow, in
shadowless light
the water looks
and welcoming"*



*n the broad,
ight of noon,
ked amiable
ng” (157).*

. . .
THE OBJECTIVE
OF THIS LESSON
IS TO DESCRIBE
AND ANALYZE
THE SYMBOLISM
OF WATER IN THIS
AND PREVIOUS
CHAPTERS.


In your groups, review the narrator's experiences with water in chapter 13 and previous chapters. Then answer the following questions:

1. Based on these scenes, what does water represent in Esther's life?
2. What power does it have?
3. How could Esther use water to help or hinder her psychological development?

Throughout *The Bell Jar*, Sylvia Plath uses symbolism to enhance the reader's understanding of Esther's progression.



THE BELL JAR: CHAPTERS 13-16

A black and white photograph of a young man and woman in a romantic pose. The woman, on the left, has dark, curly hair and is looking off to the side. The man, on the right, has dark hair and is looking directly at the camera. He is wearing a light-colored t-shirt and a dark, textured jacket. His arm is around the woman's shoulder. The background is out of focus, showing some architectural details.

*... and they
came from
families!*

V
H
E
s
a
p

by both
in good

Pay close
attention to the
1950s' setting
and culture.

• • •
What traces of
Holden and
Esther can be
seen in the
actors'
performances?

REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE (1955)

Directed by Nicholas Ray • Starring James Dean as Jim Stark •
and Natalie Wood as Judy

"It's safe to assume that the world of the film teenager would have been a very different one had *Rebel without a Cause* never been made. As Jim Stark, James Dean created a whole new breed of movie hero - the cool, troubled adolescent - and turned screen-teen culture into a genuine new phenomenon."

-Angie Errigo, *Empire Magazine*

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