

summer of the seventeenth doll summary

summer of the seventeenth doll summary offers a detailed exploration of the classic Australian play written by Ray Lawler. This article provides an in-depth synopsis of the plot, an analysis of the main characters, and a discussion of the central themes and historical context. Known for its realistic portrayal of working-class life and relationships, the play has become a significant work in Australian literature and theatre. Readers will gain insight into the narrative structure, dramatic elements, and the cultural impact of the play. This summary also highlights the symbolic significance of key motifs and the play's enduring relevance in contemporary studies. Following this introduction, the article is organized into sections covering the plot overview, character analysis, major themes, and the play's background and legacy.

- Plot Overview of Summer of the Seventeenth Doll
- Main Characters in the Play
- Themes and Symbolism
- Historical Context and Legacy

Plot Overview of Summer of the Seventeenth Doll

The plot of **summer of the seventeenth doll summary** centers on two cane cutters, Roo and Barney, who return to Melbourne every summer to spend five months with their girlfriends, Olive and Nancy. The play is set during the seventeenth summer of this annual tradition, exploring the dynamics of their relationships and the challenges that arise as time passes. The story is confined to a single setting—the rooftop room where Olive lives—intensifying the dramatic tension among the characters. The narrative unfolds over a few days and highlights themes of change, aging, and the passage of time.

Summary of Key Events

During this seventeenth summer, Roo's physical abilities begin to decline, threatening the continuity of their summer ritual. Olive clings to the idealized version of their relationship, symbolized by the "seventeenth doll," which Roo gives her each year as a token of their time together. Conflicts emerge as Roo struggles with his fading youth, Nancy confronts her own desires, and Barney attempts to maintain the group's harmony. The play culminates in emotional confrontations and revelations that challenge the characters' illusions about love and loyalty.

Setting and Structure

The entire play takes place in Olive's rooftop room in Melbourne, which serves as a microcosm of the characters' lives and aspirations. This confined setting intensifies the interpersonal dynamics and highlights the themes of entrapment and change. The play is structured in three acts, each increasing in tension and emotional complexity, reflecting the gradual unraveling of the characters' relationships.

Main Characters in the Play

The characters in **summer of the seventeenth doll summary** are carefully crafted to represent various facets of Australian working-class life and explore universal themes of love, identity, and change. Understanding the main characters is essential to grasping the play's dramatic power and thematic depth.

Roo

Roo is a cane cutter who has spent every summer for sixteen years with Olive. He is physically robust but begins to show signs of aging and decline in the seventeenth summer. Roo represents the struggle against the inevitability of change and the desire to hold on to youth and tradition.

Olive

Olive is Roo's girlfriend and the central female character. She embodies hope and nostalgia, clinging to the annual ritual symbolized by the dolls Roo gives her. Her emotional investment in the relationship highlights themes of denial and the fear of loss.

Barney

Barney is Roo's friend and a fellow cane cutter. He acts as a mediator within the group and often tries to maintain peace. Barney's character reflects loyalty and the difficulty of confronting uncomfortable truths.

Nancy

Nancy is Barney's girlfriend and provides a contrast to Olive with her more pragmatic and independent outlook. Her character introduces tension and complexity as she challenges the established dynamics among the group.

Themes and Symbolism

The play is rich in themes and symbolic elements that deepen the audience's understanding of the characters and their struggles. The **summer of the seventeenth doll summary** emphasizes these motifs as central to the narrative's impact.

Theme of Change and Aging

The inevitability of change and the process of aging are prominent themes. Roo's declining physical strength symbolizes the loss of youth and vitality, which threatens the stability of the relationships and traditions that the characters cherish.

Illusion versus Reality

Olive's attachment to the dolls symbolizes the illusory nature of the summer ritual. The dolls represent the idealized past and the desire to maintain a perfect moment in time, contrasting with the harsh realities the characters face.

Love and Loyalty

The play explores complex dimensions of love and loyalty, particularly how these emotions are tested by time and circumstance. The relationships between the characters highlight both devotion and betrayal, underscoring the fragility of human connections.

List of Major Symbols

- **The Dolls:** Represent the annual tradition and Olive's hope for permanence.
- **The Rooftop Room:** Symbolizes confinement and the characters' emotional entrapment.
- **Cane Cutting:** Reflects the transient and physically demanding lifestyle of the male characters.

Historical Context and Legacy

Understanding the historical context of **summer of the seventeenth doll summary** is crucial for appreciating its significance. Written and first performed in 1955, the play marked a turning point in Australian theatre

by presenting authentic Australian characters and vernacular speech on stage.

Impact on Australian Theatre

The play broke away from melodramatic and imported theatrical traditions, introducing a new realism that resonated with Australian audiences. It is often credited with helping to establish a distinct Australian theatrical identity and has become a staple in Australian literature and drama studies.

Cultural Significance

The play's portrayal of working-class life and its exploration of universal themes have given it enduring appeal. It continues to be studied and performed worldwide, reflecting its relevance to discussions about identity, change, and human relationships.

Legacy and Adaptations

Since its premiere, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* has been adapted into various formats, including film, radio, and television. Its legacy endures as a cornerstone of Australian cultural heritage and an exemplar of naturalistic drama.

1. Original stage play by Ray Lawler, 1955
2. Film adaptation, 1959
3. Radio and television productions
4. Contemporary theatrical revivals and academic analysis

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll'?

The main theme of 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll' is the struggle between change and tradition, focusing on the clash between youthful idealism and the harsh realities of aging and life transitions.

Who are the central characters in 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll'?

The central characters are Roo, Barney, Olive, and Nancy. Roo and Barney are cane cutters, while Olive and Nancy are women who have relationships with them during the off-season.

What is the significance of the 'seventeenth doll' in the play?

The 'seventeenth doll' symbolizes the seventeenth consecutive summer that Roo and Barney have spent with Olive and Nancy, representing a tradition that is now coming to an end as their relationships and lives change.

How does 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll' depict Australian culture?

The play portrays Australian working-class life and culture, highlighting the unique lifestyle of cane cutters, their seasonal work, and the social dynamics of post-war Australia.

What is the setting of 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll'?

The play is set in Melbourne, Australia, during the summer, focusing on a room in Olive's house where the characters spend their off-season time together.

What conflict drives the plot of 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll'?

The main conflict revolves around the characters facing the end of their annual tradition and dealing with personal changes, broken promises, and the inevitability of growing older.

Who wrote 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll'?

'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll' was written by Australian playwright Ray Lawler.

Why is 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll' considered a landmark in Australian theatre?

It is considered a landmark because it was one of the first Australian plays to present authentic Australian characters, language, and social issues, marking a turning point in Australian drama towards realism and national identity.

Additional Resources

1. *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* by Ray Lawler

This classic Australian play explores the lives of two cane cutters, Roo and Barney, and their relationships with barmaids Olive and Nancy over seventeen consecutive summers. It delves into themes of change,

aging, and the struggle to hold on to youthful dreams. The play is celebrated for its realistic portrayal of working-class life in Australia and its emotional depth.

2. *The Doll Trilogy* by Ray Lawler

This collection includes "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll" along with its sequels "Kid Stakes" and "Other Times," providing a broader context to the characters' lives. It traces the origins and aftermath of the events in the original play, offering insights into their backgrounds and evolving relationships. The trilogy enriches the understanding of the characters' challenges and the social environment of the time.

3. *Australian Drama: A Cultural History* by Leslie Rees

This book offers an in-depth look at the development of Australian drama, including a detailed analysis of "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll." It situates the play within the broader context of Australian theatrical history and cultural identity. Readers gain an appreciation for how the play influenced and reflected Australian society post-World War II.

4. *The Seventeenth Doll and Other Plays* by Ray Lawler

A collection of Lawler's significant works, featuring "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll" alongside other notable plays. This volume showcases Lawler's range as a playwright and his contribution to Australian theatre. It allows readers to explore recurring themes such as social change and personal conflict through different narratives.

5. *Changing Australian Identities in Theatre* by Philip Parsons

This work examines the transformation of Australian identity as portrayed in theatre, with a special focus on plays like "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll." It discusses how theatrical works have mirrored and influenced societal shifts in Australia. The book provides critical insights into national identity, gender roles, and cultural expectations depicted on stage.

6. *Post-War Australian Literature and Drama* by Ken Stewart

Focusing on the post-World War II era, this book explores significant literary and dramatic works, including Lawler's play. It highlights how "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll" captures the evolving social dynamics and challenges of the time. The analysis covers themes of nostalgia, economic change, and the tension between tradition and modernity.

7. *Theatre and Society in Australia* by Jill Roe

This book investigates the relationship between Australian theatre and social issues, with "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll" as a central case study. It explores how the play reflects working-class experiences and gender relations in mid-20th-century Australia. The text also considers the impact of performance and audience reception on the play's legacy.

8. *Memory and Change in Australian Drama* by Susan Lever

Lever's work focuses on the themes of memory, change, and loss in Australian plays, prominently featuring "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll." The book analyzes how playwrights deal with the passage of time and the disruption of longstanding traditions. It offers a nuanced perspective on the emotional and

cultural significance of Lawler's work.

9. *Contemporary Australian Theatre: Voices and Visions* edited by Katharine Brisbane

This anthology includes essays and critiques on landmark Australian plays, including "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll." It provides contemporary reflections on the play's themes and its place in the national theatre repertoire. The collection highlights ongoing dialogues about identity, gender, and cultural change in Australian theatre.

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