

THE MULHERN STORY LIBRARY — SALON READING GUIDE

# Hills Like White Elephants

Ernest Hemingway · Modernism · first published 1927

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AUTHOR	Ernest Hemingway
PUBLISHED	1927
ERA	Modernism
THEMES	Choice, Communication, Relationships
READER PATHWAY	Advanced adult / college seminar

## INTRODUCTION FOR THOUGHTFUL READERS

An American man and a young woman wait at a Spanish railway station, talking around an unnamed decision in clipped, evasive dialogue. The story never states the subject directly, leaving readers to infer the weight of what is left unsaid.

## HISTORICAL & LITERARY CONTEXT

First published in 1927 in the magazine *Transition* and collected in *Men Without Women*, the story is the classic demonstration of Hemingway's 'iceberg theory,' in which meaning lies beneath a spare surface of dialogue and gesture.

## DISCUSSION FOCUS

Subtext and the iceberg theory, symbolism (the hills, the river, the tracks), dialogue-driven characterization, and inference. A model for how omission, power, and syntax create moral pressure.

## SALON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does Hemingway make an unnamed subject dominate the entire conversation?
- Where do power and persuasion enter the dialogue despite the story's apparently neutral surface?

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## READ & RESEARCH

1. Encyclopedic overview at Wikipedia — [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hills\\_Like\\_White\\_Elephants](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hills_Like_White_Elephants)
2. Full text at Wikisource — [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Hills\\_Like\\_White\\_Elephants](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Hills_Like_White_Elephants)