

# Books by the Stack



## **Revolutionary Road by Richard Yates**

The devastating effects of work, adultery, rebellion, and self-deception slowly destroy the once successful marriage of Frank and April Wheeler, a suburban American couple.

**Why you'll like it:** *Quiet desperation. Realistic. Emotional. Cultural alienation.*

**About the author:** Richard Yates is the author of the novels "Revolutionary Road", "A Special Providence", "Disturbing the Peace", "The Easter Parade", "A Good School", "Young Hearts Crying", & "Cold Spring Harbor". Born in Yonkers, New York in 1926. Yates was a well-known American novelist and short-story writer. Yates first became interested in writing and journalism while attending Avon Old Farms School in Avon, Connecticut. It was not until 1961 that his career as a novelist was officially launched with the publication of his first novel, Revolutionary Road. Revolutionary Road was a finalist for the National Book Award and was subsequently made into a movie in 2008. Yates also taught writing at several universities and institutions including Columbia University, Boston University, Wichita State University, and the University of Southern California Master of Professional Writing Program. He died in 1992 in Birmingham, Alabama. (Bowker Author Biography)

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. What is the significance of the novel's title, "Revolutionary Road"? In what ways might it be read as an ironic commentary on mid-twentieth century American values?
2. Why does Yates begin the novel with the story of the play? In what ways does it set up some of the themes – disillusionment, self-deception, play-acting, etc. - that are developed throughout the novel?
3. Frank rails about the middle-class complacency of his neighbors in the Revolutionary Hill Estates. "It's as if everybody'd made this tacit agreement to live in a state of total self-deception. The hell with reality! Let's have a bunch of cute little winding roads and cute little houses painted white and pink and baby blue; let's all be good consumers and have a lots of Togetherness and bring our children up in a bath of sentimentality...and if old reality ever does pop out and say Boo, we'll all get busy and pretend it never happened" (p. 68-69). Is Frank's critique of suburbia accurate? In what ways does Frank himself live in a state of self-deception? Why can he see so clearly the self-deception of others but not his own?
4. "Revolutionary Road" frequently – and seamlessly – moves between past and present, as characters drift in and out of reveries. (April's childhood memory [pp. 321-326] is a good example). What narrative purpose do these reveries serve? How do they deepen the reader's understanding of the inner lives of

the main characters?

5. What roles do Frank's affair with Maureen and April's sexual encounter with Shep play in the outcome of the novel? Are they equivalent? What different motivations draw Frank and April to commit adultery?
6. Twice Frank talks April out of an abortion, and both times he later regrets having done so, admitting he didn't want the children any more than she did. What motivates him to argue so passionately against April aborting her pregnancies? What methods does he use to persuade her? Is John Givings right in suggesting that it's the only way he can prove his manhood?
7. Before she gives herself a miscarriage, April leaves a note telling Frank not to blame himself if anything should happen to her. But is he to blame for April's death? Why, and to what extent, might he be responsible?
8. How do Frank and April feel about Shep and Milly Campbell? What do they reveal about themselves in their attitudes toward their closest friends?
9. What role does John Givings play in the novel? Why is he such an important character, even though he appears in only two scenes? How does he move the action along?
10. Near the end of the novel, the narrator says of Nancy Brace, as she listens to Milly's retelling of April's death: "She liked her stories neat, with points, and she clearly felt there were too many loose ends in this one" (p. 345). What is the problem with wanting stories to be "neat"? In what ways does *Revolutionary Road* circumvent this kind of overly tidy or moralistic reading? Does the novel itself present too many "loose ends"?

*(Questions issued by publisher)*

