“Hills Like White Elephants”
Ernest Hemingway

**General Directions:** The questions for this story will get you to think about a theme for the story. Before you re-read and again after you re-read the story, review the study questions and try to answer them for yourself.

The **theme** of a story is some implication about human nature that goes beyond the literal story. It’s a statement that the author seems to be driving at—or to be driven by. It’s your view of the meaning behind the story based on your image of the characters, their motivation, the setting and plotting of the story, the trustworthiness of the narrator, the author’s writing style and symbolism, as well as the cultural, historical, and biographical implications for the story.

After you figure out what the author's image of life is, you need to go back through the story to figure out what details support your view. You also need to be able to explain away any details that don't support your view of the story's meaning.

**Focus Questions**
1. Looking back on the story, list the evidence that tells what kind of operation Jig is confronting. How risky is it physically and emotionally?

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2. Are you surprised that this story was written by a man? Why or why not?

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3. How do the hills in the story spotlight Jig’s decision? How does Jig see the setting as symbolic of her choices?

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4. How does the fact that Jig sees the setting symbolically get us to identify with her more readily than if the author had suggested the symbolism to us directly? Note the symbolism of the two different landscapes on either side of the Zaragosa train station, plus the possible symbolism of the curtain, as suggested in the commentary beside the story.

5. Hemingway once suggested that his purpose in such a story is to tell the reader as little as possible directly yet to reveal characters' motives and their conflict. How does this principle operate in this story? Where would you like to have more information (besides "he said" and "she said")?

6. Lewis Weeks, Jr., claimed in 1980 that "although subject, setting, point of view, characterization, dialog, irony, and compression all make 'Hills Like White Elephants' one of Hemingway's most brilliant short stories, the symbolism implicit in the title and developed in the story contributes more than any other single quality to the powerful impact." Agree with any part of this statement in detail, quoting relevant phrases from the story as needed.

7. After having read and re-read the story, what do you think the theme of the story is and why?