

**PAUL ZINDEL**

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama

**THE EFFECT OF  
GAMMA RAYS ON  
MAN-IN-THE-MOON  
MARIGOLDS**



# **The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds**

*Paul Zindel*

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# The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds

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**The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds** Paul Zindel

**The Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Paul Zindel, author of the beloved bestselling novel *The Pigman*, which *Publishers Weekly* called “remarkable...a story that will not be denied.” Fans of modern classics such as *The Outsiders* by S. E. Hinton and *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher will find much to love in Paul Zindel's books.**

The old, converted vegetable shop where Tillie lives is more like a madhouse than a home. Tillie's mother is bitter and cruel, yet desperate for her daughters' love. Her sister suffers epileptic fits and sneaks cigarettes every chance she gets.

But despite the chaos, Tillie struggles to keep her dreams alive. Tillie—keeper of rabbits, dreamer of atoms, true believer in life, hope, and the effect of gamma rays on man-in-the-moon marigolds...

Paul Zindel's work is bestselling, critically acclaimed, and passionately embraced by generations of readers.

## The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds Details

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# From Reader Review The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds for online ebook

## Martina says

I picked up Zindel's play after watching the movie adaptation. *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* as a film resonated strongly with me, so I figured I should read the play and perhaps even compare the literary work and the movie.

But after reading the play, I realized just how well Paul Newman had captured Tillie's situation and transferred it to the screen. The living conditions that border on deplorable, being just a few steps above abject poverty, living with an embittered mother and unwell sister, constantly being disregarded as the youngest and quietest, being the odd-one out at school thanks to all of the above... yes, both the play and the movie encapsulate the feelings of aloneness, distance, differentness. Tillie is radically different from her setting, both in her demeanor and tastes. She is an introverted, scientifically minded girl who does her Science fair project with so much diligence, and despite being used as a verbal punching bag, she still finds enough kindness in herself to nurture a bunny, do things for her mother (more than she is supposed to do!) and treat Nanny, the elderly boarder her mother has taken in, with respect.

The symbolism of Tillie's science project - Man-in-the-Moon marigolds exposed to various degrees of radiation - becomes obvious after being immersed in Tillie's life. Just as the modestly radiated marigolds, which have grown into wonderful specimens with useful mutations, it's hinted that that will be the outcome of Tillie's growing up in a toxic environment - a beautiful and strong human being.

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## Sandi says

At the youth hostel I was staying at, I saw this slim book on a shelf, with its doe-eyed seventies girl on the cover shrouded in marigolds--and I was drawn to it. I have such a strong sense of familiarity with this play that know I've read or seen this one before but I entirely forget when and where--maybe I saw it as a play in the park or read it in high school when my parents would have probably lent it to me because I was in the science fair, or both.

In any case, that deja-vu let it have an even more haunting effect.

It's about a damaged woman who lets her own self-destructive(?) nature take a toll on her children. Her one daughter Ruth suffers from epilepsy and is hungry for love and attention, getting rewarded in cigarettes and lipstick for scratching her mother's back. Her other daughter, Tillie, shows promise and interest in science but is often kept home from school. When Tillie wins the science fair at school her mother implodes from shame or jealousy or helplessness or desperation, or all of these at once. Tillie's science fair project involves the effects of radiation on marigolds and she finds that though some flowers die from over-exposure, others with less exposure mutate in strange and wonderful ways. This, of course, is a metaphor for her mother's emotional radiation on her daughters, producing harm in Ruth but perhaps a more resilient and unexpected result in Tillie.

What impressed me in this short play was the perfection of the mutation theme. We often see abusive homes

in a purely destructive light--that the children who are products of a divorced family are “harmed,” for instance, but the reality is somewhat more complex. Instead of “harm,” “mutation” is perhaps a more apt and optimistic comparison--these children are changed, and some perhaps even damaged, but this may be a strange and wonderful condition rather than a wholly pathetic one.

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### Ellie says

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### Shawn says

What a devastatingly great play. The play does show its age a bit, a little rust around the edges, but nothing that a good director couldn't adjust. This is an emotional play about a mother and her relationship with both of her daughters. In some ways you can say there are parallels to of the mother and Willie Loman from Death of a Salesman. Both have not accomplished what they thought they would in life, and both fooling themselves to an extent, only the mother in this is so much more self aware of her failures. Her misery she inflicts on to both her daughters with little to no thought as to what she is doing to them. One daughter is at the point or rebelling the other is there trying to appease. I thought this was a very accurate portrayal of this kind of unhealthy family dynamic, you often see this in families with an alcoholic parent.

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### Michelle Stimpson says

I've always wanted to read this play because of the title -it's a great title. One of the worst mothers in all of literary history and one of the most hopeful, sweet protagonists. I would dearly love to adopt Tillie right out of the book and bring her home with me.

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### Julie says

An interesting, quirky, and devastating play. I found myself emotionally connecting to each of the characters: the daughter who experiences extreme panic disorder, the younger less-paid-attention-to nerd daughter, the scared, possibly self loathing mother, and even the awkward Janice from the science fair (although, spoiler alert, I would never, as Janice did, boil a cat.) I am not sure yet what to make of this crazy play and the messages on it. Tillie's science fair project seemingly a symbol for the family unit. Commentary on: favoritism, ageism, self-love, and mental disorders.

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## Jori Richardson says

This heart wrenching story has to be my favorite play of all time.

Written from the innocent, simplistically factual view of a bright young middle-schooler, Tillie, we are introduced to a tense family scene where love and hate often blur into indistinguishable lines. The two supporting characters, her sister Ruth and her embittered mother Beatrice, are some of the strongest characters I have ever read.

This book is short, concise, and easy to get through, writing at the approximate level of a middle schooler. However, the story-line remains entirely adult, mature, and haunting. Regardless of its number of pages, this is one of the most powerful books I have ever read.

Paul Zindel has brilliantly combined childhood with mature and sobering conflicts - this book is depressing and a bit disturbing, unabashedly honest, and extraordinarily written. One of my favorite books of all time.

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## Hiina Shiota says

I thought that this book was very great. I really liked the characters in this book. Well, I was being Tillie, who is the main character in this book, at school. Among these characters, I liked Tillie. That was because she was smart, and she really loves Science. It was the same as me. Also, I could connect easily with the characters like Tillie. I also love Science, and had won the Science Fair before.

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## Nora says

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## Amelia says

I first saw this play two years ago, and I had fallen in love with it before the second act started.

Painful to watch (or read)? Yes. Moving? Most definitely. I have read and re-read it more times than I can count, but I can still laugh and cry every time.

This isn't a cheerful story or a happy ending--it's a real life situation that tears you apart, which is probably why I love it so much.

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## **Peter Derk says**

Minus one star because I was at a meeting where everyone had to say what they were reading, and I had to spit this whole title out.

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## **Erin says**

I was required to read this play in Language Arts class when I was a middle school student, and I just re-read it this week as I am preparing to coach the Academic Superbowl team at the middle school where I now teach.

While I might describe the storyline as powerful and thought-provoking, I would not say that I enjoyed it (then or now). It is a depressing tale, in which the young protagonist, Tillie, is at the mercy of her seemingly-deranged mother and manipulative older sister.

Not my cup of tea, but part of the "cannon" I suppose. Perhaps if I saw it performed, I would like it more.

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## **Wavegenerator says**

A terribly tragic play about an intellectually curious girl and her broken home and upbringing. She yearns to escape from the confinement of her small-minded and downward-spiralling family, while still being torn with love for them. One of my favorites!

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## **Eric says**

This story hits me on a personal level. As a teacher, I've taught kids from dysfunctional families and have witnessed the uphill ongoing battle they faced. One of my students had a parent who committed suicide. Others have persevered with parents like Tillie's mother Beatrice. It's comforting to realize that many will survive and be the stronger for their experience. I can relate to Ruth's epilepsy, accurately and sympathetically conveyed by the author. I wish I had known about this book earlier and would have read it to my older students.

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## **Claire S says**

Oh, he wrote this, too.. I'd forgotten that. I can't remember if I read this, but I certainly saw the film or became totally aware of it around that late 70's time. And I was appreciative that someone captured the whole alcoholic Mom thing, and I could step out and compare similarities/differences; that daughter's coping mechanisms vs. mine, and so on. Excellent.. (from memory).

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## Karen says

This book shredded my very soul the first time I read it and continues to do so year after year. More misunderstood freak/effed parent and school goodness, but this one is particularly heartbreaking. Apparently I love it when books just destroy me. Ok then.

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### Claudia says

Such an intense little play around a single mother doing the best she can, which is not very! She doesn't understand either of her daughters, she uses emotional manipulation with everyone, and seems so broken at the end. Tillie, the Zindel alter-ego, is a spunky little girl who sees a future, starting with her mutant marigold seeds. She's a survivor we root for. I love it when students force their books -- and plays -- on me. Thanks, Nick.

## David says

This book had been on my bookshelves for several years prior to my picking it up a few days ago. I'm not quite sure how it arrived there, although I think I may have acquired it for free at a book giveaway at my alma mater's library. To be completely transparent, I was simply looking for a quick book to read and noticed that this one was short and appeared relatively interesting, so I grabbed it and flipped through it to find out it was actually a short play, and also found the text to be quite spaced out on the page—two things that encouraged my reading of it.

A bit of brief history: *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* had its world premier in the theatre in 1964 and was published in book form in 1970. It was later adapted for the screen in 1972. Its author is Paul Zindel, a playwright and science teacher from Staten Island, New York.

The plot centers around a dysfunctional family: a widow named Beatrice Hunsdorfer and her two daughters, Matilda ("Tillie") and Ruth. Throughout the play, the introverted-yet-highly-intelligent child Tillie prepares an experiment for her school's science fair involving marigolds raised from seeds exposed to varying degrees of radioactivity. However, her self-centered and abusive mother, Beatrice, continuously attempts to halt Tillie's progress due to her own self-loathing and overall abusive nature toward her children. The other daughter, Ruth, is more extroverted than Tillie but considerably mentally unstable. As the play develops, Tillie wins the science fair through perseverance, Ruth repeatedly attempts to stand up to her mother but experiences several nervous breakdowns, and Beatrice is eventually driven insane and commits several violent acts toward her family and local community. However, despite it all, Tillie continues to believe that everyone is truly valuable.

I greatly enjoyed this play—even though I don't have much experience reading plays. The story is much more character-driven than plot driven, as there isn't a whole lot going on plot-wise, but the characters are fascinating to observe. Watching Beatrice treat her daughters with such vitriol and warden-like control is difficult but it makes for an intriguing book that is difficult to put down. Zindel does an excellent job of keeping the reader in the dark about many of the plot points and character reveals, waiting until the right moment to present new information that will help to understand what is going on in the family's overall dynamic. Even though I don't typically go to the theatre, I would certainly consider seeing this play performed live, and I highly recommend giving it a read if you get a chance, as I was pleasantly surprised.

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### **Doreen says**

I re-read this book as I was culling my library for my annual Goodwill donation, and was struck by how much better it was on the second reading. I also appreciated the number of strong female roles: it's the kind of play it would have been easy for me to stage in high school/college, where the paucity of male actors made it difficult to choose a worthy play. A quick read, but a good one; not as good as the gushing blurbs on the back, but really quite entertaining.

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