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Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Awakening

by Kate Chopin

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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The Awakening

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, students will be able to:

1. discuss nineteenth-century social attitudes toward women, children, and family.
2. identify and distinguish among the types of women presented in the novel.
3. analyze Edna Pontellier as a wife and a mother.
4. trace the progress of Edna's awakening.
5. identify and discuss the use of the literary devices symbolism and imagery.
6. understand ideas that are implied but not directly stated.
7. analyze the purpose and the effect of specific settings:
 - Grand Isle / New Orleans
 - Léonce's house / the "pigeon house"
8. consider the influence of the following men on Edna's life:
 - the Colonel
 - Léonce Pontellier
 - Dr. Mandelet
 - Robert Lebrun
 - Alcée Arobin
9. discuss the ending as the logical choice, given Edna's situation in the society of the time.
10. relate the title of the novel to the major theme of the work and support a statement of theme by referring to incidents and comments from the novel.

The Awakening

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Kate Chopin uses “awakening” in many ways in the novel. Discuss the ways in which Edna is awakened. Use specific examples.
2. Support or refute the following statement: Kate Chopin sympathizes with Edna but does not pity her.
3. Discuss two of the following images as unifying elements, making specific references to the novel: the sea, the sand, and the sky.
4. Contrast Adèle Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz, making specific references to the novel.
5. Compare Edna Pontellier and Adèle Ratignolle as mothers, making specific references to the novel.
6. Support or refute the following statement, making specific references to the novel: Robert really loves Edna.
7. Discuss the significance of the two lovers and the lady in black, making specific references to the places they appear in the novel.
8. Contrast Robert Lebrun and Alcée Arobin.
9. Compare the house on Esplanade Street and the “pigeon house.” How does each reflect the character of Edna Pontellier?
10. Discuss the purpose and effect of the song, “*Si tu savais*.”

The Awakening

Chapter I

Vocabulary

- chamomile** – a plant
- gaunt** – thin, bony
- lugger** – a small boat with a sail
- quadroon** – a person who has one African-American grandparent

1. Explain how the parrot and the mockingbird are used to introduce this chapter.

2. Describe Léonce Pontellier.

3. What does the following quotation tell you about Léonce's attitude toward his wife? He looked "at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage."

Chapter IV

Vocabulary

amicable – friendly
ample – more than enough
anticipating – expecting
atonement – to right a wrong, to make amends
bodice – a vest
Creole – a person descended from the original French settlers of Louisiana
droll – oddly amusing
efface – to make unimportant, to wipe out
embodiment – the perfect example
esteemed – to have great regard for
impervious – incapable of being hurt
insidious – more dangerous
iota – a very small amount
subsequent – that which follows

1. Describe the unusual nature of the relationship between Edna and her children.

2. What satiric comment does the narrator make concerning “mother-woman”? Cite specific words that reveal the satiric nature of these comments.

Chapter VI

Vocabulary

abysses – immeasurably deep spaces
ponderous – difficult to handle

1. What question does Robert pose to Edna after Madame Ratignolle leaves? Why does this question pose a problem for Edna?

2. How is the sea used symbolically in this chapter?

Chapter XI

Vocabulary

exalted – lifted up
exuberance – lively enthusiasm

1. How is the theme of rebellion against marriage shown in Edna's behavior when her husband returns? How does this rebellion end?
