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The Awakening
BY KATE CHOPIN



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ISBN 978-1-60389-197-4
Item No. 201419

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Pre-Reading

History
Research

Objective: Tracking the evolution of women's rights

Activity

Research the evolution of women's rights in this country, write at least two paragraphs on the subject, and answer the following questions:

- What was one event that led to the drive for women's rights in 19th Century America?
- Who was famous for working to effect changes in the balance of equality?
- What is women's suffrage?
- How would the lack of women's rights have affected married women in 19th Century Louisiana?

Women's suffrage is the right of women to have equality with men in governmental privileges such as voting and holding public office. One of the men who agreed that women should be given the vote was Thomas Paine. In the early 19th Century, all adult males were granted the right to vote; women remained excluded.

Suffragists used temperance movements to advance the cause for voting rights and other issues. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and Susan B. Anthony are among the women who worked for women's rights. Two noted men who supported the movement are Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Ward Beecher. In 1890, the National Woman Suffrage Association was formed.

Married women in Louisiana faced less acceptance, as individuals, than women in states where slavery had not been a major issue. "Protection" by husbands was an assumption, and there were certain social expectations of wives whose husbands held positions of respect or money. Married women in the late 19th Century South were under the direct patronage of their husbands and any inclinations they had towards work or private lives were strictly frowned upon.

Chapters I – XII

Research
Vocabulary

Objective: Defining unfamiliar words

Activity

In the first few chapters of *The Awakening*, the author introduces the reader to new words. The book was written in the late 19th century and is set in the Creole society in Louisiana. Words unfamiliar to us today were in common usage in that area at that time.

Using a dictionary or the Internet, fill in the following **WORD CHART**. Give the meanings of the words as they are used in the novel and write down the words we would use today. The first one is done for you.

WORD CHART

Word in story	Meaning	Word we use today
lugger	a small boat used for fishing, sailing or coasting	sailboat
quadroon	<i>a person having one-quarter Black ancestry</i>	<i>African-American</i>
rockaway	<i>a four-wheeled, two-seater carriage</i>	<i>buggy</i>
befurbelowed	<i>dressed in garments with ruffles or ornamentation</i>	<i>dolled up, decked out, or spruced up</i>
crash	<i>a coarse cotton or linen woven fabric</i>	<i>muslin</i>
programme	<i>trained performance</i>	<i>skit, comic dramatic performance, sketch</i>
weazened	<i>withered, shriveled, dried up wrinkled</i>	<i>wrinkled</i>
mincing	<i>affectedly refined</i>	<i>dainty</i>
smote	<i>inflicted a heavy blow, affected sharply</i>	<i>struck</i>
pirogue	<i>a light, slender boat made from a hollowed tree trunk</i>	<i>canoe, kayak</i>

Chapter V

Writing a Play

Objective: Re-writing a scene from *The Awakening* as a play

Activity

There is much close activity and dialogue between a few characters in Chapter V. Re-read it, imagining the characters on a stage; then rewrite it as a scene in a play. Below is an example that you may use to start your scene. Make sure you include stage directions.

As the play opens, a friendly group of people is sitting outside enjoying the summer afternoon.

Mrs. Ratignolle: "I want to tell you what I saw the other day on the beach." [She points to a spot past the large tree.]

Mrs. Pontellier and Robert exchange glances and warm smiles.

Robert [wistfully]: "I miss Mademoiselle DuVigne. She was such a kind woman, and I adored her. She always ordered me around, but I lived to do her bidding, and I miss reading to her as I once did. I do so wish she hadn't died."

Mrs. Ratignolle: "I always seemed to have you underfoot whether I wanted you there or not."

Robert: "And as soon as your husband came along, you treated me like a puppy dog."

Mrs. Ratignolle: "You didn't want me to make my husband jealous, did you?"

[The group finds that amusing; laughs.]

Robert: "How I yearned for you to give me a second glance. I spent hours of anguish trying to make you appreciate my attention."

[Mrs. Ratignolle snorts and rolls her eyes; Mrs. Pontellier begins sketching with her pad and pencil]

Robert: "Look! She's doing pretty well. Her drawing takes on a resemblance to you, Madame Ratignolle."

Chapters VII – X

Simile

Objective: Recognizing a simile

Activity

In Chapters VII – X, there are a number of similes used to describe things, actions, and people. List at least ten similes you find in these chapters and the page numbers on which you find them. We have found one for you.

1. "... of a meadow that seemed as big as the ocean to the very little girl walking through the grass..."
2. *"She threw out her arms as if swimming when she walked, beating the tall grass as one strikes out in the water."*
3. *"They were leaning toward each other as the water-oaks bent from the sea."*
4. *"Victor Lebrun objected; and his decrees were as immutable as those of Fate."*
5. *"Her little neck and arms were bare, and her hair, artificially crimped, stood out like fluffy black plumes over her head."*
6. *"Monsieur Ratignolle, who was thin and tall and swayed like a reed in the wind when he danced"*
7. *"But the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul, swaying it, lashing it, as the waves daily beat upon her splendid body."*
8. *"She missed him the days when some pretext served to take him away from her, just as one misses the sun on a cloudy day"*
9. *"The white light of the moon had fallen upon the world like the mystery and the softness of sleep."*
10. *"The sea was quiet now ...and did not break except upon the beach in little foamy crests that coiled back like slow, white serpents."*
11. *"But that night she was like the little tottering, stumbling, clutching child..."*

Chapter XIX - XXIV

Image

Objective: Finding and interpreting image

Activity

Much like her heroine Edna, Chopin is a very imaginative painter of pictures. Throughout *The Awakening*, Chopin uses extensive descriptive language to give clear portraits of characters or scenes, leaving little to the reader's imagination. For example, Chopin writes of Edna in her painting studio:

“Edna went up to her atelier – a bright room in the top of the house. She was working with great energy and interest, without accomplishing anything, however, which satisfied her even in the smallest degree.”

We see a woman dashing about a sunlit room that is high enough in the house to be rather quiet and away from household activities. She is bustling about – tinkering with small things – and though she isn't putting anything constructive on canvas at the time, she is busy and happy.

To complete the following **IMAGE CHART**, find one image from each of the chapters noted above and explain what you think the author is trying to make you see. Provide quotes and page numbers. An example is done for you.

IMAGE CHART

<p>“Their home from the outside looked like a prison, with iron bars before the door and lower windows. The iron bars were a relic of the old régime, and no one had ever thought of dislodging them. At the side was a high fence enclosing the garden. A gate or door opening upon the street was locked.”</p>	<p>The perception is an image of complete privacy and security. We see a somewhat impenetrable dwelling, cut off from the outside by bars, fences, and locked doors.</p>
<p>“[S]he discovered that person standing beside the window, engaged in mending or patching an old prunella gaiter. The little musician laughed all over when she saw Edna. Her laugh consisted of a contortion of the face and all the muscles of the body. She seemed strikingly homely... still wore the shabby lace and the artificial bunch of violets on the side of her head.”</p>	<p>The woman's continual wearing of worn lace and artificial violets gives the reader a view of a rather disorganized artist who ignores formalities and conventions and does as she pleases.</p>
<p>“That night Edna dined alone. The candelabra, with a few candles in the center of the table, gave all the light she needed. Outside the circle of light in which she sat, the large dining-room looked solemn and shadowy. ...It was so pleasant, too, to dine in a comfortable peignoir.”</p>	<p>Edna enjoys the solitude, informality, and intimacy of having a candle-lit table all to herself. She does not need the presence of others to enjoy sensual detail.</p>