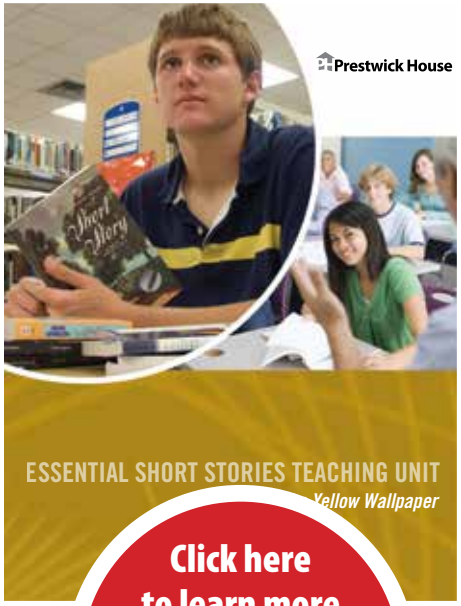




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**Teaching Unit**

**The Yellow Wallpaper**

by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

written by Rebecca Challman

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# The Yellow Wallpaper

## Biography

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860 – 1935) is the great-niece of Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. She is most famous for writing *Herland* (1915), a utopian, feminist novel, and “The Yellow Wallpaper,” which she published in 1892.

She grew up in a poor New England family and attended school for only four years. Her father abandoned the family, causing Gilman to swear she would never marry. However, in 1884, a suitor, Charles Walter Stetson, persuaded her to marry him. After the birth of their only child, a daughter, Gilman began suffering from depression, which lasted for many years.

Following a brief stay in a sanitarium, Gilman's doctor prescribed that she rest and pursue domestic duties at home. He and her husband restricted her physical activity and forbade social interaction and mental stimulation. The doctor claimed Gilman should “[h]ave but two hours' intellectual life a day. And never touch pen, brush or pencil as long as [she] live.” During this time, she did not write and devoted herself entirely to the necessities of running a household; unfortunately, Gilman had a nervous breakdown, most likely because of the doctor's recommendations. After just four years of marriage, she left her husband—a very unusual act in the nineteenth century—and took her daughter to California. There, she began writing and lecturing, recovering swiftly from what would now be termed “postpartum depression.”

Gilman eventually allowed her husband and his new wife to take custody of her daughter, thus, freeing her to pursue her own interests rather than the ones society demanded of her. She earned international acclaim for her 1898 book, *Women and Economics*. Later, she married her first cousin, Houghton Gilman. She wrote more than a dozen books before her death in 1935, when she committed suicide after battling breast cancer for three years.

“The Yellow Wallpaper” is Gilman's response to her treatment at the hands of the doctor and her husband. Critics at the time, however, panned the shocking tale as capable of driving someone mad. Gilman responds in “Why I Wrote *The Yellow Wallpaper*” (1913), that her story “was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy, and it worked.”

# The Yellow Wallpaper

## Objectives

*By the end of this unit, the student will be able to*

1. analyze the effectiveness of Gilman's use of the first-person point of view.
2. explain how the setting plays a crucial role in the story.
3. identify and discuss the central theme of "The Yellow Wallpaper."
4. examine the story for underlying ideas, such as the suppression of the creative instinct and the abuse of authority.
5. identify Gilman's use of imagery and explain how it lends meaning to the story.
6. cite examples of irony within the story and categorize them as situational, verbal, or dramatic.
7. identify and explain the symbols of the yellow wallpaper and the narrator's journal.
8. cite at least one example of foreshadowing within the story.
9. discuss the time, place, and circumstance in which Gilman wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper" and explain how it affects the story.
10. analyze the story's tone and identify the elements Gilman employs to convey it.
11. explain the nature of the major conflict within "The Yellow Wallpaper."

# The Yellow Wallpaper

## Study Guide

### Vocabulary

- alternation** – movement back and forth
- arabesque** – a floral design
- bulbous** – bulging
- chintz** – patterned cotton cloth
- debased** – reduced in value
- delirium tremens** – shaking and hallucinating
- fatuity** – foolishness
- felicity** – happiness
- flamboyant** – colorful and elaborate
- florid** – flowery
- frieze** – a sculptured, decorative band
- interminable** – never ending
- lurid** – shockingly bright
- patent** – typical, obvious
- phosphates** – salt made from phosphoric acid
- piazza** – a porch or open entryway
- querulous** – irritable; argumentative
- radiation** – an even distribution from the center
- Romanesque** – an architectural style employing curves and arches
- skulking** – prowling or creeping
- smooch** – a smudge
- symmetry** – evenness, balance
- undulating** – wavy
- untenanted** – empty, uninhabited
- wallowing** – billowing or rolling in waves

1. What point of view does Gilman employ in “The Yellow Wallpaper”? What impact does it have on the story?

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Naps or The Rest Cure

Thought: \_\_\_\_\_

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Action: \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

Anger

Thought: \_\_\_\_\_

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Action: \_\_\_\_\_

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