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**SAMPLE EXCERPTS FROM THE MONKEYNOTES FOR
"The Awakening" by Kate Chopin.**

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**The Awakening
By
Kate Chopin**



Edited by Diane Sauder

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The story opens in Grand Isle, off the southern coast of Louisiana, and continues in New Orleans, where Edna Pontellier lives in relative.....

CHARACTERS

Major Characters

Edna Pontellier - Edna is an attractive and rather idle young woman of twenty-eight. She is married to an older man, a businessman, Léonce Pontellier. During the course of the story, part of her life is spent in pursuit of a career in painting and drawing, while much of it is spent in the turmoil over her sudden "awakening." Edna lives among the established Creole elite of New Orleans, but she herself is from Kentucky. She is the middle daughter of an old Kentucky horse-trader; her mother died when she was quite young. Edna is tall and striking. She is not exactly beautiful, but she has a very commanding presence. Near the beginning of the story, she comes to the realization that her life has been lived through, and for, others--according to rules and ideas that she begins to question. The story charts her rise from that slumber and the emotional tumult that results.

Léonce Pontellier - Edna's husband is from an old Louisiana family. He is in his forties. He is tall and thin and a bit stooped. He is a businessman and lives life with a great deal of regard for appearances and propriety. Edna is one of his possessions. He tries to

Minor Characters

Victor Lebrun - Robert's younger brother, and the favored son of Madame Lebrun, Victor is a wild young man who knows he is good-looking and desirable. He is an audacious flirt and a bit immature.

Madame Lebrun - Madame Lebrun, the mother of Robert and Victor, is the ultimate mistress of her household, hardworking and usually exasperated. Her.....

CONFLICT

The story concerns Edna Pontellier's "awakening" from the slumber of southern womanhood. How she will manage her new perceptions, amid her family and lovers, is the novel's main concern.

Protagonist: Edna is clearly the main character, although she is not quite a standard nineteenth-century "heroine." Edna is complex, sometimes spoiled, sometimes.....

Antagonist: There is no exact character working against Edna. "Society" in general, and patriarchy in particular, are the forces that she.....

Climax: The climax comes when Edna goes to attend the birth.....

Outcome: Edna cannot figure out how to live with the complexity of the freedom she has fought so hard to establish for herself. Certainly, her confusion over.....

PLOT

Edna Pontellier is an upper-middle class white woman who has married into the Creole elite of New Orleans. She (and sometimes her husband) and her two boys are vacationing in Grand Isle when she begins to realize that there must be more to life. She is brought to this idea by a desire to live more fully, to love as she has never loved, and to solve her nagging dissatisfaction with material things and marriage. She forms a bond with a young man, Robert Lebrun, whose mother runs the resort. He has the habit of forming these bonds with women at the resort, but this one is.....

THEMES

Major Themes

Awakening from the slumber of patriarchal social convention is the main theme of the book. Edna must rouse herself from the life of dullness she has.....

Minor Themes

Familial relationships are investigated in this book and rejected by.....

MOOD

A kind of wry but sympathetic voice tells the story of Edna's turmoil. Although told in the.....

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

KATE CHOPIN

Katherine O'Flaherty Chopin, born in 1851, spent most of her life in St. Louis, although she is known for her stories of Louisiana Cajun and Creole life. Her mother, Eliza Faris, came from an aristocratic French Creole family, while her father, Thomas O'Flaherty, was an Irish immigrant who worked hard and became prosperous before his early death (1855) in a train accident. Kate attended Catholic school, spent time with her French Creole grandmother, and had a decided interest in musical arts and reading in both English and French. Being a proper Southern young woman of.....

LITERARY/HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Although for several decades after her death Kate Chopin's work was largely ignored, it is now thought of as very much in the grand tradition of turn-of-the-century literary fiction, along with the work of Edith Wharton and Henry James.

When *The Awakening* was first published, many critics found a tormented heroine a distasteful subject for a ladies' novel. What is clear in retrospect is that many of the United States' greatest writers took seriously crises in the lives of American women in the.....

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES

CHAPTERS I-VI

At the Grand Isle resort, a green and yellow parrot and a mockingbird scream back and forth from their cages, annoying Mr. Léonce Pontellier. From the porch of his own cottage, Mr. Pontellier surveys the resort, the patrons at their relaxations and Madame Lebrun at work with her servants. He sees his two children with their quadroon (one-quarter Negro) nurse. He smokes, grows bored with his paper, and

watches Mrs. Pontellier come up the beach to the cottage with Robert Lebrun. Mr. Pontellier feels that Mrs. Pontellier's mid-day swim and subsequent sunburn show poor judgment, for she has "damaged" herself. Mrs. Pontellier gestures to Mr. Pontellier for her rings. She puts them on her hands, and when she and Robert start to laugh, Mr. Pontellier wants in on the joke. But they have nothing interesting to recount, and Mr. Pontellier tries to persuade Robert to come with him to Klein's hotel to gamble. But Robert wants to stay and talk to Mrs. Pontellier (Edna), and so Mr. Pontellier goes off with a promise to his little boys to bring them a treat. Mrs. Pontellier knows that her husband may or may not be back for dinner; they fully understand each other, often without words.

Mrs. Pontellier's eyes are yellow-brown, like her hair. They are quick and piercing. Although she is not classically beautiful, she is attractive in an unconventional way. Chopin writes of the heroine, "Her manner was engaging."

Edna is under thirty and Robert is even younger. He is clean-shaven and carefree. He smokes and talks about himself, while Edna fans herself and listens. Robert wants to go to Mexico for a business venture. He speaks English, Spanish, and French. He likes.....

Notes

The first six chapters present the main characters and the story's conflict: Edna becomes aware of her position as a married woman who has a fairly dull life--and who enjoys the attentions of an unmarried young man. Chopin starts by painting a clear picture of Léonce Pontellier as a typical "good" husband: he indulges his family in little treats but also has certain expectations of his wife and his home. He sees his wife and children as prized possessions and does not engage with them very much.

Chopin presents a clear picture of the Lebrun resort at Grand Isle and of the Creole society that inhabits it. The quadroon nurse stays at a certain distance, as if according to

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTERS

Edna Pontellier

The story centers around Edna's crisis of realization. The question is whether or not she is strong enough to pursue her quest for fulfillment. By the end of the story, one sees that Edna is a very perceptive and strong person. But she lives in a society that cannot accommodate

Robert Lebrun

No character in the book is as fully formed as Edna, but Robert.....

Léonce Pontellier

Léonce falls out of the narrative about half way through the novel. This is consistent within a book that is following Edna's consciousness: past a.....

Alcée Arobin

Another male type, Alcée is the slimy manipulator, the one who.....

PLOT

The plot of this short novel is exquisitely crafted. The action is swift; not a detail is left out or left over.

Each chapter builds on the realistic and psychological stakes of the previous one. As the tension builds, the reader becomes aware of a complexity that is.....

THEMES

The Awakening is loaded with symbolism. The bird metaphor--from the cawing, impatient parrot at the beginning, to the damaged seabird at the end--is full of allusions to.....

QUESTIONS

1. Explain the title, *The Awakening*.
2. How does the Creole setting/temperament function in Chopin's novel?.....

END OF SAMPLE MONKEYNOTES FOR "The Awakening" BY Kate Chopin