

Name:

Date:

### Before Reading

Part A: What comes to mind when you read the three words below? Write five words under each of the following ideas that you associate with each term.

Marriage:

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

Freedom:

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

Death:

PREVIEW

Part B: Partner up with someone and compare what you have written down for Part A. Then decide on two final words for each term. Be prepared to share with the class.

Marriage:

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

Freedom:

PREVIEW

NOT FOR EDUCATIONAL USE

Death:

## **The Story of an Hour**

1. In the story you are about to read, the entire plot takes place during the duration of 60 minutes. What types of thing can you accomplish in one hour? Give an example of an hour of your typical day.

### **Background**

“The Story of an Hour” is a short story written by Kate Chopin in 1894. Kate Chopin was born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1850 as Kate O’Flaherty. While growing up, Kate’s father was killed in a railroad accident and her brother died in the civil war; subsequently, she grew up in a household with all women. At the age of 25, Kate married a man named Oscar Chopin and they had six children together. He passed away in 1882, making Kate a widow at the young age of 30. She was left with a huge amount of debt from her husband’s death and so she took over his shop’s operation. During this time period, women were not meant to work or be independent, so this decision led Kate to be judged by many individuals within her community. In 1884, Kate moved back to St. Louis where her mother still lived and spent her remaining years focused on writing.

In the 19th century, the women’s suffrage movement was afoot. For decades, women fought for the right to vote among other freedoms that granted them equal citizenship in the United States. During this time, it was customary for women to stay home and fulfill only domestic duties, such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the children. Moreover, women were expected to be modest, quiet, polite, and cater to their husband’s needs at all times.

### **During Reading Questions**

1. What news did Josephine break to her sister Mrs. Mallard? Why was Josephine careful in the way she did this?

2. What is Mrs. Mallard’s initial reaction to the big news? Is her reaction similar or different than what someone would expect?

3. What word(s) did Mrs. Mallard start whispering to herself when she was alone in her room? What realization was she coming to?

PREVIEW

4. What does Mrs. Mallard observe when she looks out the window?

5. How do the other characters view Mrs. Mallard? How do you know?

PREVIEW

6. What caused Mrs. Mallard's death according to the doctor? Why is it ironic?

7. How does the mood of this story change from beginning, middle, to end?

PREVIEW

### **After Reading Questions**

1. How does the third person point of view create dramatic irony?

PREVIEW

2. Why did Louise feel "free" after her husband's death?

3. What does the open window symbolize in this story?

4. What is the purpose of Kate Chopin writing this story?

5. In the line, "There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination," Chopin suggests that it is a crime to impose will upon another person, no matter their intention. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.

6. Do you think Louise loved her husband? Why or why not?

7. What is at least one theme from this story?

8. Why is it ironic that as Louise walked toward the stairs at the end of the story, "There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory"?

9. This story was originally published with the title, "The Dream of an Hour." How is this title more fitting and why do you think Chopin opted to change the title when the story was reprinted in 1895?

## Teacher's Key

Link to short story: <https://www.katechopin.org/story-hour/>

### Before Reading

Part A: What comes to mind when you read the three words below? Write five words under each of the following ideas that you associate with each term.

Activating strategy: This activity gets students thinking about how marriage is portrayed today and what freedom means to them. Additionally, they think about a typical response to something as dark as death. All of this prior knowledge will help students recognize the irony present in the story, make connections to the text, and identify how the historical background of the 19th century greatly impacts the plot.

These are just examples. Answers will vary—no right answers.

Marriage:

- Love
- Happiness
- Wedding
- Partnership
- Best friends

Freedom:

- Independence
- Rights
- Opportunities
- Happiness
- Choice

Death:

- Funerals
- Sadness
- Grief
- Depression
- Crying

Part B: Partner up with someone and compare what you have written down for Part A. Then decide on two final words for each term. Be prepared to share with the class.

Marriage: Answers will vary—no right answers.

Freedom: Answers will vary—no right answers.

Death: Answers will vary—no right answers.

## The Story of an Hour

1. In the story you are about to read, the entire plot takes place during the duration of 60 minutes. What types of thing can you accomplish in one hour? Give an example of an hour of your typical day.

Answers will vary—no right answers.

### Background

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### During Reading Questions **Answers**

1. What news did Josephine break to her sister Mrs. Mallard? Why was Josephine careful in the way she did this?

Louise's husband, Brently, was on the list of killed citizens after a tragic railroad accident. Josephine had to be careful because Louise had a heart condition, and this terrible news might threaten her safety.

2. What is Mrs. Mallard's initial reaction to the big news? Is her reaction similar or different than what someone would expect?

"She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her." This was typical as she cried and wanted to be left alone to grieve.

3. What word(s) did Mrs. Mallard start whispering to herself when she was alone in the room? What realization was she coming to?

She kept repeating the word "free" and saying, "Free! Body and soul free!" She started to realize, that while she was sad that Brently was dead, her whole life has finally opened up. She thinks about the future she can have now that she isn't dependent on a husband anymore. It makes her feel excited and empowered.

4. What does Mrs. Mallard observe when she looks out the window?

She looked out at the open square before her house and saw "tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves. There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window." Louise witnessed spring in its earliest stages... the beauty.

5. How do the other characters view Mrs. Mallard? How do you know?

The other characters view Louise as fragile and physically weak. Josephine and Richard take high precautions while speaking to Louise. Josephine tells Louise the news in broken sentences and Richard was quick to prevent Louise from finding out in a setting that may be too shocking for her (he rushed to their house to break the news). Later on, Josephine kneels by the door begging for Louise to open up, worried that she may hurt herself. Richard then tries to block Louise's view at the end of the story when Brently walks in, to protect her from shock... again.

6. What cause Mrs. Mallard's death according to the doctor? Why is it ironic?

She died of "heart disease—of joy that kills." In reality, her dream of living for herself and the hope for a bright future was stolen from her when she realized her husband was still alive. It shocked her, which caused her fragile heart to collapse. It is ironic because it was not joy that killed her, but disappointment.

7. How does the mood of this story change from beginning, middle, to end?

The story begins on a depressing and tragic note with the death of Brently. Soon, the story fades into calmness, relief, and hope. Louise, although ashamed of her joy, feels optimistic. The story ends in a horrifying and shocking way.

### After Reading Questions **Answers**

1. How does the third person point of view create dramatic irony?

The point of view allows readers to know that Brently is "dead" before Louise knows, and that people treat her so delicately because of her heart condition. Readers also know that Louise was feeling relieved and happy when she was "grieving" in her room, meanwhile, Brently had no clue that anyone even thinks he is dead.

2. Why did Louise feel "free" after her husband's death?

She no longer had to serve her husband and live according to his rules. She was free to make decisions on her own, not under anyone's control.

3. What does the open window symbolize in this story?

The open window represents openness, choice, opportunities and freedom; everything that Louise has gained; the nature outside the window represents new life being born, just as Louise feels she has a fresh start.

4. What is the purpose of Kate Chopin writing this story?

Kate probably wrote this story to emphasize to the world that women are oppressed to such a level during this time period, that the notion of their husband's death—which should be tragic—is actually relieving.

5. In the line, "There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination," Chopin suggests that it is a crime to impose will upon another person, no matter their intention. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.

Answers will vary.

6. Do you think Louise loved her husband? Why or why not?

Answers will vary. Yes and no. The text states, "And yet she had loved him—sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!" She loved him, but she loved herself more.

7. What is at least one theme from this story?

You never really know what's going on under the surface of someone else's life.

Your entire life can change in an instant.

Most people require a sense of independence.

Tragedy can help people realize how they really feel about something.

8. Why is it ironic that as Louise walked toward the stairs at the end of the story, "There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory"?

Louise walks exuding strength—like a goddess who has just acquired victory—to the stairs, only to see her husband, alive and well; this is Louise actually walking to her death due to her weak and frail heart.

9. The story was originally published as "The Dream of an Hour." How is this title more fitting and why do you think Chopin opted to change the title when the story was reprinted the following year?

The word dream can be represented in two ways: firstly, the whole hour felt like a dream because it wasn't ever real since Bentley was never actually dead. Secondly, the hour felt like a dream come true because Louise realizes her freedom she gains from Brently's death and for the first time, she can actually picture a life that will be happy and fulfilling. For this time period, the word dream (with its positive connotations) would probably be interpreted as offensive. Because of the societal norms, critics might say that it is too harsh for a woman to claim her husband's death a dream come true, no matter how oppressed she is. To avoid controversy and ensure that her story remained published, Kate probably changed the title to include a more neutral term, such as "story."