

Kate Chopin
1851-1904

Kate Chopin was raised in an upper class family in St. Louis, Missouri. She married and moved to New Orleans, and later rural Louisiana, where she lived with her husband and family until he died suddenly and she returned to St. Louis with her children. She “began to write poems, stories, and sketches in which she drew on her years in Louisiana,” and the “Creoles, Cajuns, blacks, and Indians, of mixed backgrounds and cultures, whom she had known both in New Orleans and in the back country” (359). Her short pieces were widely successful, but her third novel, *The Awakening*, resulted in “social disgrace” and the novel was even banned (359). The novel is about a woman who is a traditional, obedient wife and mother, until she “awakens” to new ideas of independence, sensuality and passion, abandoning both her husband and children as she flees the oppressed life typical of women at the turn of the century. The novel “has received greater appreciation in the twentieth century, as have the works that deal with the personal problems of women and with racial problems” (359).

“Kate Chopin.” In Donald T. Hollenbeck and Julie West Johnson eds., *Literature*. Evanston, IL: McDougal, 1984.

“The Story of an Hour”

<http://archive.vcu.edu/english/engweb/webtexts/hour/>

The Story of an Hour

Synopsis: The story opens as Louise Mallard, who is “afflicted with a heart trouble,” is being consoled by her sister, after learning her husband has been killed in a train wreck. She had “wept at once, with sudden wild abandonment,” then retires to her room to be alone. As she sits in her room, still with occasional sobs, “as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams” she becomes aware that a new feeling is stealing into her thoughts. She strives to “beat it back with her will—“but is powerless, when “a little whispered word escape[s] her slightly parted lips... ‘free, free, free!’” At first terrified by the “monstrous” thought, she begins to think about her new life. She would live for herself, rather than having someone live for her; there “would be no powerful will bending hers.” “‘Free! Body and soul free!’ she kept whispering.” As she returns downstairs with “triumph in her eyes” and carrying herself “unwittingly like a goddess of Victory,” the front door of her home opens and in walks her husband, completely oblivious to the mistaken news of his death. “When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease—of joy that kills.”

The Story of an Hour, by Kate Chopin
Reading Response

Read the story, then answer the questions, quoting from the story to support your answers.

1. What was Louise Mallard's initial response to the news of her husband's death? _____

2. How did Louise's reaction change as she sat in her room? _____

3. From what is Louise now "free"? List at least three from the story. _____

4. Why couldn't Louise simply leave her husband? What was a woman's life like in 1900?

5. Do you agree that Louise died "of joy that kills"? Why or why not? _____

6. What parallels can be drawn between the experiences of women and African Americans at this time?

7. What might be some "slogans" or "catch phrases" that both African Americans and women might use in their struggles?
