

The Yellow Wallpaper

Discussion Questions

Over the next several classes we will be discussing *The Yellow Wallpaper*. We will read contemporary medical documents, suffrage literature, biographical information, critical responses, and do some response writing to understand the context surrounding the story's publication.

Before examining the story's context, we will begin in a **formalist** way by examining the story itself.

Discuss the following questions in your groups; be sure to provide evidence for your responses and use point form notes to gather and record your thoughts. Choose one question to report on to the class.

1. Consider the **setting** of the story, including the nursery. How does this outer world mirror the narrator's situation and ordeal – her inner world?
2. How does the **narration** mimic the narrator's mental state? Consider her style of writing, what she includes, what she omits, and her tone.
3. What is John's attitude toward his wife, especially in terms of her illness? What words does he use to refer to her? While thinking about this issue, consider the **symbolism** of the "nursery."
4. Identify some of the ways in which the **conflict** between the narrator and her husband is established. Consider what the two characters represent.
5. What are the narrator's feelings toward her husband? How do they change throughout the story?
6. Would you consider the woman in the story a **reliable narrator**? If not, how does this affect your reading of the story?
7. How does the wallpaper function in the story? What purpose does it serve in the narrative and in understanding the narrator?
8. What does the creeping figure in the wallpaper represent?

9. Who and/or what is the narrator struggling against in this story and how does she try to rebel?
10. In what ways might the ending of the story be seen as both a victory *and* a defeat for the narrator?
11. Who is Jane?

BTW in this story, “smooch” means “smear” or “stain”, not “kiss”.

For next class (Monday, October 22)

- Read “Exhibition” on the website *The Literature of Prescription: Charlotte Gilman and **The Yellow Wallpaper***. There are six sections to the exhibition and reading all of these will give you some context for the story. The link to the web page is on my blog.
- Having read and discussed the story and having read “Exhibition,” you will **come to class prepared with three questions** to share about the story and/or its context.

Coming up...

We will deepen our understanding of the story’s context by reading contemporary medical literature, suffrage documents, and correspondence relevant to *The Yellow Wallpaper*.

You will write personal responses to some of these pieces; these responses will become the basis for in-class discussion. You will spend time revising one of your responses and submit it for assessment.

Finally...

When we have finished *The Yellow Wallpaper*, we will conclude our short story unit with an in-class essay. I estimate this essay will take place no earlier than **November 2nd**, but I will give you the exact date next week.

