

The Awakening Book Notes

The Awakening by Kate Chopin

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Author/Context

Kate Chopin (1850-1904)

Born Catherine O'Flaherty to Irish and French heredity in St. Louis, Kate Chopin grew up in a privileged world of society and properness. Closely influenced by the stories and personality of her maternal grandmother, a staunch Creole, she would often hear stories that later found their ways into her writings. Kate graduated from the local St. Louis chapter of the Academy of the Sacred Heart and soon entered society as a socialite, attending parties, dances, and gatherings. She seemed to enjoy them, allowing her critical eye to capture them in her work on paper as she created images of such festivities in detail. At the ripe age of 20, Kate married Oscar Chopin, another wealthy Creole and successful cotton broker in Louisiana. After the couple traveled to Europe on vacation, they returned to the states and moved to the plush 'newer American' side of the big city of New Orleans. They did not want to live around the old French Quarter, and instead lived a lavish, society life, in which Kate gave birth to six children and played her role as a dutiful, adoring wife. Soon after this lavish financial glory died, the Chopin family was forced to move to Cloutierville, a small rural town in Louisiana. Oscar died of malaria three years later, leaving his beloved Kate with the burden of six children, a house, and an enormous debt.

After her husband's death, Chopin returned to her roots in St. Louis where she began to write. Her first novel, *At Fault*, published in 1890 was a moderate success, but did not truly establish Chopin as a reputable writer. She wrote for several publications and translated French works into English. However, it was not until *The Awakening and other stories*, published in 1899, on the cusp of the turn of the century, change, and exploration, did Kate Chopin's work receive the notoriety it deserved. *The Awakening* is a story of adultery and sexual awakening that was not won over flawlessly by the critics and society of the time. Some found it too harsh, too sexual, and too shocking. Although Chopin had written a small library of works, including *Bayou Folk* and collections of short stories *A Night in Acadie* and *A Vocation and the Voice*, it is *The Awakening* (which only earned her \$150 in royalties) that ultimately placed her in the league of revered writers. While alive, the groundbreaking story prevented her from entrance into the St. Louis Fine Arts Club and ceased further exploration of her writing talents. She wrote very little after the harsh critical reception of her masterpiece.

Despite the controversy over *The Awakening*, it is now studied in almost every high school and college, has been published over twenty times, and translated into French, German, Italian, and several Scandinavian languages. During the 1970s, in which feminism began to circulate throughout the entire American culture, Chopin's work reemerged as a precursor to women's rights. It has spawned hundreds of essays discussing Edna's role as a possible feminist, painter, adulteress, and more. The ambiguous ending of the book has also created a wave of critical study, causing *The Awakening* to be at the pinnacle of study in academia today. While Chopin studied Dickens, Goethe, and Bronte, some would say that she influenced and anticipated William Faulkner and D.H. Lawrence.



According to New York Times Review of Books and Newsweek Magazine, "Chopin is an uncommonly entertaining writer...She was long before her time in dealing with sexual passion and the intricate familial and personal emotions of women...Chopin's oracular feminism and prophetic psychology almost outweigh her estimable literary talents" (Gibbons' foreword, vii).

Chopin died of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1904. She never knew the fame and honor her masterpiece would command in the future and never expanded her library of work for fear of more scandal.

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Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening: An Authoritative Text Biographical and Historical Contexts and Criticism*. Edited by Margo Culley. W.W. Norton and Company, New York: 1994.



Plot Summary

Leonce Pontellier and his young wife, Edna, spend the summer months at Grande Isle. While resting, Leonce gambles and works in business at the local hotel, Klein's, and visits Carondelet Street in New Orleans during the week. Edna learns how to swim on the beach and befriends Madame Adele Ratignolle and Robert Lebrun. As Edna is discovering new ways to live on her own and support herself in the water, she spends almost all her time with Robert, developing feelings for him. Adele warns him not to flirt with Edna, for she is not like them - society people who come and go at their pleasing.

There are several parties during the weekends, in which dancing, singing, and nonchalant banter are the norm. One day at the Lebrun cottages, Mademoiselle Reisz, a middle aged, single, eccentric pianist, plays the Chopin Impromptu. Edna is mesmerized by the music and nostalgic by the emotions it elicits. She generally does not like Mademoiselle Reisz, but is nonetheless enthralled. Reisz asks Edna how she liked the music and believes her to be the only worthy audience member that day.

One evening at dinner, Robert announces to his mother and everyone else that he is leaving for Mexico in the evening for an indefinite period of time. Edna is shocked and hurt, and leaves the table to mend her aching heart. Adele follows her, agreeing that Robert showed little respect by not telling her that he was planning on leaving.

After Robert leaves for Mexico, Edna feels as if she sees him everywhere, thinks of him all the time, and tries to continue with her life in New Orleans without him. She starts to spend most of her time with society people at the horse races and Jockey Club. She seeks Mademoiselle Reisz for comfort and advice. She slowly becomes more independent and does not live her life for Leonce or her children alone; rather, she lives her life for herself.

Edna's father, the Colonel, comes to town and beckons Edna to come to her sister, Janet's wedding. Edna refuses, claiming that weddings are a melancholy event. They dine, attend the Ratignolle's soirees, and discuss family matters.

Leonce Pontellier leaves for New York on business for an extended period of time. While away, Edna begins to awaken even more to her own life, her own soul. She paints, goes out alone spontaneously and refuses to return other people's calls. Leonce was worried about her odd behavior before he left and sought help from Doctor Mandelet. The two men simply assumed that her mood would pass.

Edna neglects her housework and decides to move out of their large home on Esplanade Street and into a smaller "pigeon-hole" home down the block. She hosts a grand farewell dinner party before she moves out, which is a great success. Her friends, with the exception of an ill Adele Ratignolle, attend. Alcee Arobin seduces Edna soon after, and although Edna feels guilty for giving into her carnal pleasures; she feels remorse for her beloved Robert - not her husband Leonce.



After moving into the pigeon house, adjusting to her new life, and painting portraits, landscapes, and anything she can see, Edna still misses Robert. She seeks Mademoiselle Reisz one day for comfort, and instead finds Robert at her home. She is shocked to learn that he has returned without finding her. They bicker and soon express their love for one another. Edna plans to be with him and only him. While back at her small home, a servant of Monsieur Ratignolle comes to find Edna to bring her to the Ratignolle home. Adele is in labor and wants to see Edna. Edna tells Robert to stay and wait for her. Once there, Adele whispers to Edna to think of her children.

When Edna returns home, Robert has left with a goodbye note that tells of his love for her. She is so hurt and shocked that she stares at the wall all night, holding the letter in her hand. The following day, Edna goes to her beloved ocean, removes all her clothes, and walks into the water. She continues farther and farther until she is seen no more.



Major Characters

Mrs. Edna Pontellier: Edna Pontellier is the principle character in the book who awakens to a new life as she discovers her independence. She is the young wife of Leonce Pontellier and the mother of the two young boys, Raoul and Etienne. During the summer months spent at Grande Isle, Edna learns how to swim, befriends Madame Adele Ratignolle, and falls madly (and secretly) in love with Robert Lebrun. During the remainder of the novel, she lives in New Orleans, spends time with pianist Mademoiselle Reisz, has an affair with Alcee Arobin, moves into her own pigeon-house, abandons her old life, and declares her love for Robert. When he leaves her at the end of the novel, Edna walks naked into the ocean, leaving the readership to wonder whether she has intentionally or unintentionally drowned.

Mr. Leonce Pontellier: Leonce Pontellier is Edna's wealthy, old-fashioned husband. Although he occasionally shows his love through material gifts, he more than often shows his frustration through anger. He finds Edna to be irresponsible, and elicits help from Dr. Mandelet as to her moody disposition. He travels to New York on business for a large portion of the novel, during which Edna moves out of the large house on Esplanade Street into her pigeon-hole and falls in love with Robert Lebrun.

Robert Lebrun: Robert Lebrun is the younger, attractive, flirtatious man with whom Edna falls madly in love. He is the elder son of Madame Lebrun, has had a scandalous affair with Mariequita, the young Spanish girl, runs off to Mexico on moment's notice, and breaks Edna's heart. Although he does sincerely love Edna, he leaves her twice without following through on his feelings.

Adele Ratignolle: Madame Adele Ratignolle is the epitome of perfect womanhood from this era, mother of five children, and ideal wife to Alphonse Ratignolle. She becomes a close friend and confidante of Edna while at Grande Isle and watches out for her dear friend in the ways of love. She warns Robert Lebrun to stay away from Edna. Although she does not attend Edna's farewell dinner because of illness, she cares deeply for Edna. Her final wishes to Edna are to think of her children.

Mademoiselle Reisz: Mademoiselle Reisz is the eccentric single pianist who charms Edna with her Chopin Impromptu at Grande Isle. She is a close friend of Robert Lebrun, who writes to her requesting a performance of Chopin for Edna any time she wishes. Mademoiselle embodies everything that Madame Ratignolle does not - independence, carefree attitudes about appearance, a single life with no children, and a life filled with art. Although Edna dislikes her at Grande Isle, she seeks her company and advice in New Orleans.

Alcee Arobin: Alcee Arobin is the young, charming, somewhat scandalous man who ultimately seduces Edna into his arms. He is part of the crowd in which Edna spends time in New Orleans, is a womanizer, gambler, and businessman.



Minor Characters

Raoul: Raoul is one of Edna and Leonce Pontellier's two young sons. He becomes slightly ill towards the beginning of the novella, causing Leonce to yell at Edna for being an irresponsible mother.

Etienne: Etienne is the other young son of Edna and Leonce Pontellier.

Alphonse Ratignolle: Alphonse Ratignolle is Adele Ratignolle's devoted Creole husband. He comes to Edna's farewell dinner representing the two and seeks Edna when his wife lays ill.

Janet: Janet is Edna's younger sister who gets married during the course of the novella. Edna chooses not to attend the wedding, despite their father's urgings.

Margaret: Margaret is Edna's older sister.

Mariequita: Mariequita is the little Spanish girl with whom Robert Lebrun had an affair before the course of the novel. She is scattered throughout the story and reminds Edna of Robert's possible torrid past.

Madame Antoine: Madame Antoine owns an inn where Edna sleeps after her fainting spell. She speaks only French and openly welcomes Edna into her rooms.

Tonie: Tonie is Madame Antoine's son, who helps Robert with the boat.

Dr. Mandelet: Doctor Mandelet is the elderly physician who is a dear friend of Mr. Pontellier and devoted doctor to several local families. He tells Leonce that Edna's mood will pass and that women are a moody species. He is late to the Ratignolle's during Adele's last moments and tells Edna that she should not be present during such a trying time.

The Colonel: The Colonel is Edna's father who was an officer in the Confederacy during the Civil War. He enjoys the parties, singing, dancing, and drinking at the Ratignolle parties and tries to convince Edna to come to his sister's wedding. He wonders why Edna and Leonce do not spend more time together at night.

Mrs. Highcamp: Mrs. Highcamp is a middle-aged society woman who busies herself planning her daughter's social life. She spends time with Edna, Alcee Arobin, and Mademoiselle Reisz in the city and at the races, and also attends her farewell dinner.

Miss Mayblunt: Miss Mayblunt is a young woman, no longer in her teens, that prides herself on intellectual banter and attends Edna's farewell dinner.

Mr. Gouvernail: Mr. Gouvernail is Miss Mayblunt's companion at Edna's farewell dinner.



Celestine: The solitary servant that Edna retains from the large house on Esplanade Street to her new pigeon house.

Farival Twins: The Farival twins dominate the atmosphere at Grande Isle with their obnoxious singing and ubiquitous presence. They are always at the parties and are never spoken of in high regard by Edna Pontellier or Adele Ratignolle.

Madame Lebrun: Madame Lebrun is the mother of Robert and Victor, runs the cottages in Grande Isle, and is friendly with Edna in New Orleans.

Victor Lebrun: Victor is Robert's younger brother and the treasure of Madame Lebrun. He flirts with Edna Pontellier and constantly tells her how beautiful she is. He also attends Edna's dinner and spends time with her crowd in New Orleans.



Objects/Places

Lebrun Cottages: The Lebrun family owns the cottages at Grande Isle where the first third of the book takes place. Madame Lebrun runs them and befriends Edna Pontellier.

Klein's: Klein's is the hotel near Grande Isle in which Leonce Pontellier spends much time and money. Most of the young men, older men, businessmen, and husbands pass the summer evenings at Klein's.

Carondelet Street: Carondelet Street is the street in New Orleans where Leonce Pontellier does much of his business and bumps into Robert Lebrun on several occasions.

The Ocean/Sea: Edna and Robert kindle their romance by the ocean. Edna loves the water and learns how to swim, spending most of her free time inside the open arms of the sea. She eventually meets her end, while wandering deep into the ocean water.

Chopin Impromptu: Mademoiselle Reisz plays the Chopin Impromptu at Grande Isle, mesmerizing Edna. Robert writes to her, telling her to play the Chopin Impromptu for Edna whenever she asks.

Esplanade Street: The Pontellier house is located on Esplanade Street, a sophisticated, wealthy section of New Orleans.

Pigeon house: The pigeon-house is Edna's new, small home, where she keeps only one servant, paints, and finds her freedom and independence.

Cheniere: Cheniere is the church on Grand Isle, which many people attend. When Edna and Robert attend, she faints.

Grande Isle: Grande Isle is the location of the summer home for the Pontellier's and Ratignolle's. They stay at the Lebrun cottages during these summer months. Edna and Robert meet and spend all their time together while on Grande Isle.

New Orleans: Edna and Leonce live in the city of New Orleans during the remainder of the year. Leonce leaves New Orleans during a large portion of the novel to work in New York.



Quotes

Quote 1: "Mr. Pontellier wore eye-glasses. He was a man of forty, of medium height and rather slender build; he stooped a little. His hair was brown and straight, parted on one side. His beard was neatly and closely trimmed." Chapter 1, pg. 2

Quote 2: "...looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage." Chapter 1, pg. 3

Quote 3: "He reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children. If it was not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it?" Chapter 3, pg. 7

Quote 4: "The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels." Chapter 4, pg. 10

Quote 5: "The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clearing, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in the abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation. The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace." Chapter 6, pg. 17

Quote 6: "Her marriage to Leonce Pontellier was purely an accident, in this respect resembling many other marriages which masquerade as the decrees of Fate. It was in the midst of her secret great passion that she met him. He fell in love, as men are in the habit of doing, and pressed his suit with an earnestness and ardor which left nothing to be desired." Chapter 6, pg. 23-24

Quote 7: "The very first chords which Mademoiselle Reisz struck upon the piano sent a keen tremor down Mrs. Pontellier's spinal column. It was not the first time she had heard an artist at the piano. Perhaps it was the first time she was ready, perhaps the first time her being was tempered to take an impress of the abiding truth...She saw no pictures of solitude, of hope, of longing, or of despair. But the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul, swaying it, lashing it, as the waves daily beat upon her splendid body. She trembled, she was choking, and the tears blinded her." Chapter 9, pg. 33-34

Quote 8: "A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before." Chapter 10, pg. 36

Quote 9: "That she was seeing with different eyes and making the acquaintance of new conditions in herself that colored and changed her environment, she did not yet suspect." Chapter 14, pg. 53



Quote 10: "For the first time, she recognized the symptoms of infatuation which she had felt incipiently as a child, as a girl in her early teens, and later as a young woman. The recognition did not lessen the reality, the poignancy of the revelation by any suggestion or promise of instability. The past was nothing to her; offered no lesson which she was willing to heed. The future was a mystery which she never attempted to penetrate. The present alone was significant; was hers, to torture her as it was doing then with the biting conviction that she had lost that which she had held, she had been denied that which her impassioned, newly awakened being demanded. Chapter 15, pg. 59

Quote 11: "I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it more clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me." Chapter 16, pg. 62

Quote 12: "She was seeking herself and finding herself in just such sweet, half-darkness which met her moods. But the voices were not soothing that came to her from the darkness and the sky above and the stars. They jeered and sounded mournful notes without promise, devoid even of hope." Chapter 17, pg. 69

Quote 13: "It sometimes entered Mr. Pontellier's mind to wonder if his wife were not growing a little unbalanced mentally. He could see plainly that she was not herself. That is, he could not see that she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we would assume like a garment with which to appear before the world." Chapter 19, pg. 75

Quote 14: "Courageous, *ma foi!* The brave soul. The soul that dares and defies." Chapter 21, pg. 84

Quote 15: "Woman, my dear friend, is a very peculiar and delicate organism - a sensitive and highly organized woman, such as I know Mrs. Pontellier to be, is especially peculiar. It would require an inspired psychologist to deal successfully with them. And when ordinary fellows like you and me attempt to cope with their idiosyncrasies the result is bungling. Most women are moody and whimsical. This is some passing whim of your wife, due to some cause or cause which you and I needn't try to fathom." Chapter 22, pg. 87

Quote 16: "A feeling that was unfamiliar, but very delicious came over her." Chapter 24, pg. 95

Quote 17: "Her husband seemed to her now like a person whom she had married without love as an excuse." Chapter 25, pg. 102

Quote 18: "Conditions would some way adjust themselves, she felt; but whatever came, she had resolved never again to belong to another than herself." Chapter 26, pg. 106

Quote 19: "There was something in her attitude, in her whole appearance when she leaned her head against the high-backed chair and spread her arms, which suggested



the regal woman, the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone." Chapter 30, pg. 117-118

Quote 20: "He did not answer, except to continue to caress her. He did not say good night until she had become supple to his gentle, seductive entreaties." Chapter 31, pg. 123

Quote 21: "She writhed with a jealous pang. She wondered when he would come back. He had not said he would come back. She had been with him, had heard his voice and touched his hand. But some way he had seemed neared to her off there in Mexico." Chapter 34, pg. 136

Quote 22: "She put her hand up to his face and pressed his cheek against her own. The action was full of love and tenderness. He sought her lips again. Then he drew her down upon the sofa beside him and held her hand in both of his." Chapter 36, pg. 141

Quote 23: "Her seductive voice, together with his great love for her, had enthralled his sense, had deprived him of every impulse but the longing to hold her and keep her." Chapter 36, pg. 142

Quote 24: "I love you. Good-by - because I love you." Chapter 38, pg. 148

Quote 25: "The water of the Gulf stretched out before her, gleaming with the million lights of the sun. The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude. All along the white beach, up and down, there was no living thing in sight. A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water." Chapter 39, pg. 151-152

Quote 26: "She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again. Edna heard her father's voice and her sister Margaret's. She heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air." Chapter 39, pg. 153



Topic Tracking: Feminism, Femininity and Independence

Feminism 1: When Leonce looks at his sun burned wife as a piece of his property that has been damaged, he is demonstrating male chauvinism at its height. According to him, she has no independence, no personal self-fulfillment, and must only live for him.

Feminism 2: Leonce believes that Edna is not performing her womanly duties and is an irresponsible mother. He believes women must tend to their children, household duties, and their husbands alone. So, when Edna begins to show signs of independence, he erupts with frustration and anger.

Feminism 3: Adele Ratignolle embodies everything about femininity and womanhood of the last century. She is devoted to her husband, who adores her, gives birth every two years, and adorns herself with lavish clothing and jewelry. She depends on her family, not herself, and is notable for her beauty.

Feminism 4: Adele knows the strength of her own femininity and warns Robert not to play with the somewhat primitive sense of feminism that Edna possesses. Adele can flirt and play coquettishly with Robert, but worries that Edna can only do so if sincere. She worries that her fellow female friend may get hurt by a relationship with Robert.

Feminism 5: Edna's venture into the deep ocean waves at night after the Ratignolle's party seems a stroke of independence. She displays her new talent in front of her friends and undertakes it on her own. Everyone watches her swim into new, unknown territory in the water, and also in her soul, for she is now awakening to her independence and female capabilities, aside from simply cleaning, cooking, and child-rearing.

Feminism 6: Edna stands up to Leonce later the same night of her groundbreaking swim. She says no to him and will not follow him inside. This lack of obedience angers him. She has awakened from a nap, and it seems also a dependent life that she hopes to leave behind, as well.

Feminism 7: When Robert informs Edna that he is leaving for Mexico, she feels suffocated and hurt, as if she is dependent upon Robert for her livelihood and happiness. Whatever independence she feels she may have awakened to, it seems unimportant and irrelevant without Robert.

Feminism 8: Edna claims that she will not be the typical female of the time and give up her entire world - her entire self and soul - for her children. She will give her life, but not her soul. Mademoiselle Reisz is shocked to hear this from a mother, but in a sense, understands. Edna thinks of her self and her soul independently of her family.



Feminism 9: After Leonce yells at Edna for not acting like the typical female wife, she explodes in a silent uprising of her own. She cries, breaks a glass, and stomps on her wedding ring. This behavior is not that of a dependent, dainty wife. Instead, it is a picture of a woman awakening to her unique femininity and foresight of independence.

Feminism 10: Edna increasingly acts according to her own personal desires, with little to no regard to Leonce's wishes. She goes outside alone, visits friends alone, and ultimately frustrates her husband. Leonce has difficulty dealing with his wife's new independent nature and thinks her to be mentally unstable.

Feminism 11: Leonce is so frustrated and confused by his wife's new actions that he visits his family doctor, Dr. Mandelet, for advice and aid. Dr. Mandelet claims to have discovered nothing extraordinarily new on Edna's condition. He just relates the fact that women are a complicated and confusing species. He believes that Edna is just in a bizarre mood and that it is certain to pass.

Feminism 12: Edna begins to enjoy her new independent life without Leonce. She grows accustomed to doing things on her own and finding her own friends and begins to spend time with a new group of people. This natural progression towards independence seems inevitable, especially with Leonce away in New York on business.

Feminism 13: Edna openly admits to never wanting to belong to anyone else again. This claim brings her ahead of her time, outside of the typical female of the time, and into a somewhat futuristic, feministic woman.

Feminism 14: Edna has moved in and is living comfortably in her new pigeon house. She visits her children in Iberville at their grandmother's and returns home to her independent, solitary life. She enjoys having time to herself, delineating when and where she wants to see other people.

Feminism 15: After Adele tells Edna to think of her children and Dr. Mandelet inquires as to Leonce, Edna bursts with frustration. She wants nothing to do with dependence on other people and she doesn't want anyone to depend on her. She simply wants her independence, to become her own woman in her own way, and to not give up her entire life and soul for her children. She wants her life for herself...and her love affair with Robert.



Topic Tracking: Painting

Painting 1: Edna is fascinated by the art of painting and attempts to sketch and paint her friends. She finally has the opportunity to paint Adele Ratignolle, a woman she claims to be as poised as a Madonna. She also paints Robert Lebrun. Edna throws away some of her sketches, claiming to be an amateur artist.

Painting 2: As Edna describes her youth and distant life in Kentucky, she paints images in her mind. She desperately wants to paint them, but instead uses the paint of memories. As a painter, Edna often uses artwork as her analogies to life. Although this piece of artwork is not physically paint on canvas, it is a metaphysical existence of paint on canvas in Edna's mind and memory.

Painting 3: Madame Lebrun shows Edna pictures of Robert as a young child and claims that he never took any pictures past a certain age. For Edna, a woman who values portraiture and painting, the idea of her beloved not wanting to be in a picture is disturbing.

Painting 4: After Leonce leaves the house, Edna brings herself together and tries to discover new outlets in her social life. She looks through her old sketches and sees the problems with her painting and technique.

Painting 5: Edna shows Adele Ratignolle her sketches for the first time, secretly hoping for overwhelming approval. Adele adores her work, compliments her on her talents, and silently thrills Edna. Edna keeps a few and gives the rest of the paintings to her friend, inspiring more work.

Painting 6: Edna's fickle mood dictates her ability and desire to paint. Sometimes she feels down and does nothing. Other times, the sun shines and she paints everything in her sight, freely and at will.

Painting 7: When Edna is in a somber mood, she seeks her friend Mademoiselle Reisz to discuss art and painting. She tells her of her desires to paint and become an artist. Mademoiselle Reisz tells her that an artist must have a courageous soul.

Painting 8: Alcee Arobin desperately wants to see Edna's work - her paintings. She puts off this request for a long time because she is not yet ready to welcome him into that part of her world. Her artwork and painting is extremely important to her and seems to be a portion of her identity, for anyone who knows her wants to see her work.

Painting 9: When Edna finally sees her beloved Robert again, it is at the home of Mademoiselle Reisz. He arrives, unexpected by Edna, and shocks her with his presence in New Orleans. He sees her work and one of the sketches of the head of Alcee Arobin and becomes angry. He doesn't understand why she would paint *that* man. Her painting becomes a reason to argue, instead of a reason to celebrate.



Painting 10: Edna hopes to study painting in Paris with the great artists of the time. Since Leonce hopes to travel to Europe, she hopes to improve upon her artwork and sense of independent skill while living as a typical traveling wife. She is not so serious about these classes, but thinks they would be a good experience if she does, in fact, travel abroad with Leonce.



Topic Tracking: Water/Beach

Water/Beach 1: Edna Pontellier and Robert Lebrun kindle their silent romance at the beach. The first image of Edna is of her sun burnt on the sands, flirting with a man who is not her husband. The book begins in the water and also concludes in the water.

Water/Beach 2: The ocean is currently the only place in which Edna feels pure comfort and solace. She goes to it when in need of happiness and support. It is here in the water and on the beach with Robert that she opens her soul and walks openly into new waves. She does not understand why the ocean makes her feel as it does, but she goes to it nonetheless.

Water/Beach 3: As Edna swims out far into the ocean, she begins to get lost. She is somewhat afraid and somewhat exhilarated, for her new skill of swimming has brought her to unknown territory. Everyone watches from the shore as Edna displays her new swimming talents, and everyone also worries that she has swum out too far. She returns unharmed.

Water/Beach 4: Robert leaves Edna and walks in the direction of the beach. When the two depart from one another, they seem to always go to the place in which they found one another: the beach. It is her place of comfort...and is most likely his as well.

Water/Beach 5: While Robert is gone and Edna tries to move on with her life, she spends most of her time at the beach. She feels that the water is the only place in which she feels comfort and contentment and Robert. It is, after all, not only the place in which she develops feelings for Robert, but contrastingly it is the place in which she finds a sense of independence swimming in the water.

Water/Beach 6: As Edna and Robert catch up after so many months away from one another, they remind each other of the time they spent at Grande Isle on the beach. It is there that their relationship was at its purest and strongest. They both think of the other while at the beach or near water.

Water/Beach 7: Edna visits the water and dips her feet into it briefly. Once again, the water elicits so many mixed emotions, from her childhood and that summer at Grande Isle with Robert. The ocean is a seductive and powerful force that pulls Edna away from her world and into one of its own independent nature.

Water/Beach 8: Edna sees her bathing suit, but instead decides to undress and walk into the water naked as the day she was born. She pictures so many people in her life as she walks deeper into the water. It beckons her forward and she swims deeper and deeper until she is breathless and cannot turn around. The book begins and concludes with Edna in the water, just as life begins in water.



Chapters 1-3

A green and yellow parrot sings in the background in French and a little Spanish, giving the Lebrun cottages outside New Orleans in the small community of Grande Isle a relaxing atmosphere. Mr. Pontellier looks over the old newspaper with frustration at his present rural, non-business environment.

"Mr. Pontellier wore eye-glasses. He was a man of forty, of medium height and rather slender build; he stooped a little. His hair was brown and straight, parted on one side. His beard was neatly and closely trimmed." Chapter 1, pg. 2

Mr. Pontellier looks around at his surroundings. He sees Madame Lebrun running around giving orders to her servants, people going to Sunday church, and his well-groomed young sons of ages four and five. He looks to the sunlight on the beach and sees his wife, Mrs. Pontellier, and young Robert Lebrun. He cannot understand why they have chosen to bathe at such an hour with the heat and looks at his wife from afar "as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage" Chapter 1, pg. 3. Edna and Robert joke about her rings, leaving her husband confused and frustrated. He cannot understand why Robert would rather stay and chat with Edna than do anything else. He leaves, perhaps to play billiards at the local hotel, Klein's. His two sons obediently follow him.

Topic Tracking: Water/Beach 1

Topic Tracking: Feminism, Femininity and Independence 1

Mrs. Pontellier (Edna) and Robert continue to talk about everything from the locals who attend Cheniere (church) to his intent to go to Mexico to find his fortune. Edna's eyes are described as bright and quick, with the intense coloring of yellowish-brown, which matches her hair. Her eyebrows are slightly darker than her hair, giving her a handsome, rather than beautiful, appearance. Robert, on the other hand, is a clean-shaven young man with the countenance of a bohemian - without a care in the world. He smokes cigarettes because he cannot afford cigars. Roberts works in New Orleans as a clerk and is visiting his mother in Grand Isle. They speak of their youth, their past, their dreams, and their relationships. Edna reads aloud a letter from her sister, Janet, who currently lives in the East and is engaged to be married. Robert is intrigued by these two sisters and their mannerisms and intentions. The two finish their conversation to prepare for dinner. Edna wonders where her husband, Leonce, is, and if he will steal away from the game playing at Klein's for a short enough time to see her. Her two children seem to enjoy Robert's company.

Mr. Leonce Pontellier comes home at eleven o'clock at night delighted with his evening of games, spirits, and winnings. He is extremely talkative and cannot understand why his wife cares so little about his night. He goes into the boys' room to see them sleeping and believes Raoul to have a fever. When Edna explains that they are perfectly healthy and happy, he erupts with anger, blaming her for being inattentive and a bad mother. "He reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children. If it



was not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it?" Chapter 3, pg. 7. Edna storms out of the room, ignoring Leonce's words, and begins to cry mercilessly. She cannot explain why her crying does not stop, for she understands that it is common in marriage. She feels an indescribable oppression come over her and allows herself to cry alone, with mosquitoes biting her entire body.

Topic Tracking: Feminism, Femininity and Independence 2

The following morning, Leonce awakens early - and in good spirits - to return to the city and Carondelet Street for work. He will not return to the cottages until the next Saturday. He gives Edna the money from Klein's and leaves. Within several days, Edna receives a package of fruits and candies from Leonce, garnering an anonymous outpouring of praise for the supposed best husband in the world - Leonce.



Chapters 4-7

Mr. Pontellier continues to express his disgust at his wife's performance in her motherly duties. However, Mrs. Pontellier simply is not a mother-type of woman. She is alone in her existence at Grand Isle.

"The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels." Chapter 4, pg. 10

Topic Tracking: Feminism, Femininity and Independence 3

Adele Ratignolle, one of the regulars at Grand Isle and friend of Edna's, epitomizes this mother-woman in every exquisite way. Her long blonde flowing hair complements her striking blue eyes, slender arms, growing figure, and delicate hands. She is knitting winter garments for her children and offers to do so for Edna's. After seven years of marriage, she has had three children, one every two years, and is presently pregnant. She speaks of her pregnancy as "a condition."

Robert, Madame Ratignolle, and Mrs. Pontellier routinely sat by the cottages talking, gazing, and sewing. Robert, at a youthful 26 years, habitually followed an older woman, declaring his love and passion. In jest, he would speak amorously towards Adele - an action that Edna rejoices in not receiving.

Edna dabbled in painting and would often bring a canvas and paints outside to their conversations. She finally paints Adele, a subject she believes to be as poised and beautiful as the Madonna, but crumples up the sketch and throws it away. Occasionally as she paints, Robert places his head lovingly on her arm. She shuns his actions, but does not forbid them. Her children come running up to her to investigate the contents on the bonbon box beside her. They carry her paints inside as Madame Ratignolle has a fainting spell from the long day. Robert invites Edna to bathe in the ocean. She sees the water as a loving entreaty, welcoming her with assertion and strength. He removes her hat and the sun sets as they walk together towards the beach.

Topic Tracking: Painting 1

Edna cannot explain her actions and visitation to the beach with Robert. She feels contradictory impulses and walks into them openly. Edna is beginning to understand her place in the universe as a woman and more so, as a human being. She sees this man two years her junior and feels safe with her emotions and her soul. She also understands how tumultuous and chaotic this early time of discovery is for a soul. She feels comfort in the ocean.

Topic Tracking: Water/Beach 2



"The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clearing, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in the abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation. The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace." Chapter 6, pg. 17

Edna is attracted to Adele's grace, charm, and beauty, and the two become inseparable, close friends, walking to the beach and cottages together, sometimes escaping Robert. Their cottages, the Ratignolle's and the Pontellier's, are joined, allowing the two women to easily spend time together, relaxing by the beach and watching young lovers pass by. Adele asks Edna what is on her mind. Edna shrugs off the question, leading Adele to remark about the heat causing too much strain on the mind. She believes they do not need to think too strenuously. Edna describes her present view of the beach, with the blue sky and grand ocean that makes her think of her youth in Kentucky. She speaks of the scenery as a painter craving a canvas to create art. She remembers wandering away from church and remarks that she sometimes feels like that little girl trying to avoid church, walking through a green meadow.

Topic Tracking: Painting 2

Adele takes Edna's hand in hers and begins to comfort her physically. Edna is not used to such elicit expression of emotion, for she had always fought with her sisters, Janet and Margaret, and was never truly close with any girlfriends growing up in Kentucky. She never held any close friends and occasionally had crushes on different men. She had occasional infatuations with everyone from a cavalry officer to a young plantation gentleman from Mississippi. She felt resigned in her fate of an empty and emotionless life of relationships, and this feeling soon led to her marriage. "Her marriage to Leonce Pontellier was purely an accident, in this respect resembling many other marriages which masquerade as the decrees of Fate. It was in the midst of her secret great passion that she met him. He fell in love, as men are in the habit of doing, and pressed his suit with an earnestness and ardor which left nothing to be desired" Chapter 6, pg. 23-24. It was a combination of her father and Margaret's opposition to his Catholic religion and his unrelenting flattery that led to their marriage. Soon, the devotion died and the reality set in. Despite her empty soul, Edna seems resigned to accept her fate.

Although she recalls these past memories and emotions that day on the beach, she does not reveal them to Adele. Adele comforts her as best she can until Robert Lebrun arrives with both sets of children. As they leave to return to the cottages, Adele complains of leg cramps and relies on Robert to help her walk inside.



Chapters 8-10

Adele Ratignolle speaks earnestly with Robert Lebrun, asking him to leave Edna Pontellier alone. He does not understand. She tells him that Edna is not one of them - a flirtatious socialite - and may take his advances seriously. Robert gleefully teases her, bringing up the possibility that he may, in fact, be serious in his attempts. Adele relates several stories of willful, illicit love affairs that should not have been, including the letter-writing tale of Alcee Arobin. Robert playfully ignores her warning and offers to make her a cup of Bouillon.

Topic Tracking: Feminism, Femininity and Independence 4

Robert walks to his mother's cottage and sees a little black girl working on a sewing machine near his mother. He inquires as to Mrs. Pontellier's whereabouts and discovers that she is on the beach with her children. Madame Lebrun informs him that his younger brother, Victor, is going to the rockaway, and that Montel, will be in Vera Cruz during the next month. Montel is a middle-aged man with whom Madame Lebrun has spent time since her husband's passing. They continue to speak over the noise of the sewing machine, as Robert persistently presses his mother for information regarding Edna Pontellier.

Several weeks after Adele and Robert's conversation about Edna, Grand Isle is host to a large celebration, in which families dance together, eat ice cream and cake, and the children perform musical numbers. The Farival twins play piano, while others sing and dance. Edna dances with her husband, Robert, and Alphonse Ratignolle, Adele's tall, svelte Creole husband.

Robert asks Edna if she would like to hear Mademoiselle Reisz play the piano. He tells her that she is fond of her, and brings her into the room. Mademoiselle Reisz is a homely middle-aged woman, an artist, who claims that Edna is the only person in that room worth hearing her music. Edna is fond of music and recalls listening to Adele practice a piece that Edna called "Solitude," for the music elicited a feeling for Edna of a naked man standing besides rocks on the seashore. When Mademoiselle Reisz begins to play chords on the piano, Edna is stunned.

"The very first chords which Mademoiselle Reisz struck upon the piano sent a keen tremor down Mrs. Pontellier's spinal column. It was not the first time she had heard an artist at the piano. Perhaps it was the first time she was ready, perhaps the first time her being was tempered to take an impress of the abiding truth...She saw no pictures of solitude, of hope, of longing, or of despair. But the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul, swaying it, lashing it, as the waves daily beat upon her splendid body. She trembled, she was choking, and the tears blinded her." Chapter 9, pg. 33-34

After the performance, Mademoiselle Reisz comes up to Edna to ask her opinion of the performance. The music had aroused not only Edna, but the entire crowd.



As the crowd dies down, Robert contemplates a bath in the sea at such a mystic, moonlit hour. Robert would always suggest a walk on the beach, and nobody would ever disagree. He would trail behind the Ratignolle's and Pontellier's with unclear intentions. Edna desired to swim and undertakes lessons during the summer. "A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before" Chapter 10, pg. 36. Edna continues to learn how to swim and ventures out into the sea, while her husband and friends look on. When she returns, she expresses her fear of swimming out too far that she cannot return. Leonce claims that he is watching, so she will not get lost in the waves. Everyone takes pride in Edna's new skill as she returns to the bathhouse to change into dry clothes.

Topic Tracking: Feminism, Femininity and Independence 5

Topic Tracking: Water/Beach 3

Robert walks Edna back to her cottage. They exchange words and hold each other in comfort. She waits in the hammock for Mr. Pontellier to return while Robert gets her a pillow and shawl. He waits with her for her husband and smokes a cigarette. The two sit in silence, as their desire for one another increases with each moment. Robert says goodnight and Edna watches his figure move in and out of the moonlight.



Chapters 11-13

Leonce returns to the house to find Edna sprawled out in the hammock. He speaks to her, but she does not respond. After several attempts to bring her inside, she tells him she wants to stay outside. He worries that the mosquitos will bite her. Leonce becomes overtly frustrated and speaks down to his wife. She awakens and walks inside, asking him if he is coming. He replies that he will as soon as he finishes his cigar.

Topic Tracking: Feminism, Femininity and Independence 6

Edna sleeps very little and awakens early on Sunday morning. Most people are still asleep or are at Cheniere church. Robert joins her as they look around at their surroundings. They walk to the beach and see a little Spanish girl named Mariequita gathering shrimp, the lovers resting from their long passionate night, and the sea. Edna stares at her dirty brown feet and exquisite black eyes. Mariequita questions Robert about Edna and wonders why she is staring at her. Robert tells Mariequita that Edna is not his sweetheart, that she is a married woman with two children, and that the two lovers they see embracing on the side are *not* married. Mariequita reminds Robert of another couple who ran off together, despite the imposition of side marriages.

Robert covers Edna's face with the umbrella to block the sun's rays. They laugh about finding a pirate's treasure and sharing the wealth. They walk off together, forgetting about everyone behind them.

Edna almost faints while in church services and trips over Robert as she leaves the room. Monsieur Farival almost follows to check up on her, but stops as soon as he sees Robert exiting to do so. Robert remarks that it was silly to have gone to Church and that Edna should rest at Madame Antoine's cot at the far end of the village. She speaks no English, but nonetheless welcomes Edna into her building openly and graciously after speaking with Robert. Although she had not gone to church, her son Tonie had. Madame Antoine's place is immaculate, clean, and white. Edna hears the chickens below and Robert and Tonie speaking below the shed. She detects the strong Acadian accent.

Edna awakens after hours of slumber to Robert and an empty house. She inquires about everyone else and the events of the afternoon. He tells her that everyone is out, her friends stopped by to see how she was doing, and that Leonce will not worry because he knows she is with him. He teases her that she has been asleep for a hundred years and society has since changed.

Madame Antoine returns and sits her plump body on a bench beside the door where Edna sleeps. Edna and Robert leave to sail on Tonie's boat in the misty evening.



Chapters 14-17

Etienne, Edna's younger son, had been acting up all night while under the care of Madame Ratignolle. It is only nine o'clock and Leonce has already gone to Klein's to look over stocks and bonds, while the children lay down in the cottage. Robert remarks that the two have spent the entire day together, save the few hours that Edna was asleep. He then presses her hand and walks away in the direction of the beach. As he leaves, Edna misses his musical voice and their laughter throughout the day. She wonders why he left and realizes that she is seeing life in a new way now. "That she was seeing with different eyes and making the acquaintance of new conditions in herself that colored and changed her environment, she did not yet suspect" Chapter 14, pg. 53.

Topic Tracking: Water/Beach 4

Edna enters the dining room at an unusually late hour after her bath and sits between Monsieur Farival and Madame Ratignolle. The topic of conversation is Robert Lebrun's trip to Mexico this very evening. Edna is shocked and disturbed, for she hears of this news from others (while he is at the table), after having spent the entire day with him without his saying a word about going to Mexico. Everyone at the table questions him persistently about his departure. He declares that he made the decision that afternoon at four o'clock. Madame Ratignolle, Victor, and Beudelet make jokes about Mexico and the few Mexican stories they have heard and hope that Robert will exercise extreme caution while there. Edna is frustrated with such nonsensical chatter, for she wants to hear nothing of Mexico. Edna leaves the table after finishing her coffee and begins to straighten up her room, change clothes, and order her dinner. Madame Ratignolle comes to see how she is and to inquire as to why she left the table earlier. She begs Edna to return to the table. Edna declines, saying she does not want to redress and go down to the table again. Madame Ratignolle agrees that Robert showed little respect by not telling anyone about Mexico earlier and returns to the table, for fear that two missing women would show little respect to Madame Lebrun.

Robert comes upstairs to see Edna. She explains her hurt and frustration with his silence and abrupt departure. She has grown accustomed to seeing him, spending time with him, and receiving his kind attention. He claims to have done nothing wrong and promises to write to her while away. She hopes he does not forget her and walks away.

Topic Tracking: Feminism, Femininity and Independence 7

"For the first time, she recognized the symptoms of infatuation which she had felt incipiently as a child, as a girl in her early teens, and later as a young woman. The recognition did not lessen the reality, the poignancy of the revelation by any suggestion or promise of instability. The past was nothing to her; offered no lesson which she was willing to heed. The future was a mystery which she never attempted to penetrate. The present alone was significant; was hers, to torture her as it was doing then with the



biting conviction that she had lost that which she had held, she had been denied that which her impassioned, newly awakened being demanded. Chapter 15, pg. 59

Madame Ratignolle continually questions Edna as to her well being without Robert. Whatever free time she has, she spends in the water at the beach, for she claims those are her only true moments of pleasure. She sees Robert everywhere, in everything and everybody. Edna spends time with Madame Lebrun looking at photographs of Robert as a baby and young boy. She divulges that Robert refused to take a picture when he got older.

Topic Tracking: Water/Beach 5

Topic Tracking: Painting 3

Madame Lebrun had received a letter from Robert in Mexico that only contained a short postscript in regards to Edna about loaning her the book he was reading to her prior to his departure. Everyone in town knows how close the two were while he was at Grand Isle - even Mr. Pontellier - and cannot understand how she gets on without him. Mr. Pontellier would often see him on Carondelet Street in New Orleans.

Edna speaks with Mademoiselle Reisz about her sense of self and about Robert. She reveals her passions and how she would give almost anything for her children...but not herself. "I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it more clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me" Chapter 16, pg. 62. Edna thinks of Madame Lebrun and proclaims that she would do anything for him, her favorite son. Mademoiselle Reisz corrects her passionately by stating that Victor is the one and only favorite son for whom she lives and dies. She tells Edna about a scandalous affair Robert had with a little Spanish girl. Edna realizes that it is Mariequita. Frustrated with Mademoiselle Reisz's venomous words, Edna puts on her bathing suit and goes into the water. They exchange addresses, agree that the summer has been exciting (except for the mosquitoes and Farival twins) and hope to visit in the city after the summer.

Topic Tracking: Feminism, Femininity and Independence 8



Chapters 17-20

The Pontellier household on Esplanade Street in New Orleans is draped in fine décor, silver, and artwork. Mr. Pontellier takes enormous pride in his home and possessions while Mrs. Pontellier unhappily welcomes visitors and callers. On Tuesday - reception day - Edna wears a more plain dress than normal and declares at dinner that she has gone out during the day. Shocked by such news, Leonce explodes at his wife, wondering how and why she could leave their house on Tuesday, when people come to visit. He looks at the cards of the visitors that missed Edna and cannot understand how his wife could put their business in such damage, by leaving so unexpectedly. He leaves and Edna finishes dinner alone. She feels short of breath and leaves the table to go to her room. Looking out the window, she sees the darkness and the garden. "She was seeking herself and finding herself in just such sweet, half-darkness which met her moods. But the voices were not soothing that came to her from the darkness and the sky above and the stars. They jeered and sounded mournful notes without promise, devoid even of hope" Chapter 17, pg. 69. She tears up her handkerchief, takes off her wedding ring, and stomps on it on the ground. She picks up a glass vase and flings it on the ground, breaking it to pieces. A maid hears this crash and comes in to inquire, when she sees the mess on the ground. She worries about Edna's feet and returns her wedding ring found on the ground. Edna slides it back on her finger.

Topic Tracking: Feminism, Femininity and Independence 9

The next morning, Mr. Pontellier gets up early to leave to buy new fixtures for the house. Edna declines the invitation to accompany him, wondering why he needs to spend more money. He tells her to take care of herself because she is starting to look pale, and leaves. Edna stands on the veranda and overlooks the boys playing, the fruit vendors in the street, and thinks about the previous night. She then looks through some of her old sketches and sees their shortcomings. She stares in the mirror, scrutinizing her hair, her moles, her skin.

Topic Tracking: Painting 4

She walks through the streets thinking of Robert. Her infatuation has grown immense and passionate, and she can think of nothing else until she walks over to meet her dear friend, Madame Ratignolle, with whom she has been a close friend since the summer at Grand Isle. She lives near Edna, for Monsieur Ratignolle owns and runs the drugstore on the corner. Edna sees the Ratignolle's as very *French*. They throw lively parties once a fortnight with music and dancing.

When Edna arrives, Adele Ratignolle is folding laundry. She abandons it to entertain her dear friend. Edna shows Adele her paintings and desires to paint Adele. She values her opinion greatly and hopes for positive feedback on her work. She humbly revels in Adele's overt appreciation of her painting. She gives her several as gifts, greets Monsieur Ratignolle and leaves, contemplating her life and her feelings for her friend.



Topic Tracking: Painting 5

Edna thinks her actions of the previous night to be foolish. She wonders how could she have stamped upon her wedding ring. She begins to surround herself and her being with independence by going outside alone, abandoning her Tuesday meetings, not returning people's calls, and painting anything and everything in her presence. Leonce has difficulty dealing with his wife's independent mind.

"It sometimes entered Mr. Pontellier's mind to wonder if his wife were not growing a little unbalanced mentally. He could see plainly that she was not herself. That is, he could not see that she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we would assume like a garment with which to appear before the world." Chapter 19, pg. 75

Topic Tracking: Feminism, Femininity and Independence 10

There are days in which Edna is thrilled to be alive, to paint, see the sun, rain, and mood. And there are also days in which she is unhappy. Regardless, she makes her own moods and begins to live her life the way she wants, without impositions and orders.

Topic Tracking: Painting 6

On one of the days in which Edna is unhappy, she desires to see Mademoiselle Reisz and sets out to find the pianist in the city. She discovers in the city directory that she lives on Bienville Street, a hefty distance from her own home. The area is filled with mulattos and people, who all think poorly of Mademoiselle Reisz. The proprietor tells Edna that she had left the neighborhood and does not know her current residence. Edna's desire to see the pianist grows so intense that she thinks of asking Madame Ratignolle who despises her. She walks over to the Lebrun house to inquire. Victor answers the door with elation upon seeing Mrs. Pontellier. Edna decides to wait outside and sit on the outside furniture while she hears Victor's stories of the city. Madame Lebrun eventually enters the room of wicker furniture, dressed in summer white, and attacks Mrs. Pontellier with questions. She gives Edna Mademoiselle Reisz's address, declining to accompany her, and talks about Robert's letters from Mexico. He is doing well. Edna is thrilled with her afternoon ventures so far and leaves to find her pianist friend. Victor remarks that Mrs. Pontellier looks beautiful.



Chapters 21-23

Mademoiselle's Reisz's apartment under the roof is hidden from traffic and has a beautiful view of the Mississippi River. She is shocked and elated to see Edna arrive on her doorstep, thinking that she was never coming. She teases Edna about being a society woman with no time. Edna relates the news of her painting. Robert has also sent Mademoiselle Reisz letters about Edna, wondering how she is, how she looks, and asking her to play a Chopin piece on the piano for her. Mademoiselle Reisz does not allow Edna to see the letter, for she believes letters are only for the eyes of the intended. When Edna speaks more of her desires to be a painter, Mademoiselle shows her that many things are essential to becoming a true artist. A courageous soul is part of the artist mentality. "Courageous, *ma foi!* The brave soul. The soul that dares and defies" Chapter 21, pg. 84. Mademoiselle places the letter in Edna's hands and plays the Chopin Impromptu at both her and Robert's written request. Edna sobs as she hears the music, for it elicits the emotions she felt earlier in the summer. After the music stops, she asks if she can return. Mademoiselle is thrilled to look forward to another visit from Edna. After Edna leaves, Mademoiselle Reisz picks up the tear-drenched letter from the ground and returns it to her drawer.

Topic Tracking: Painting 7

On his way into town one morning, Mr. Pontellier stops to visit his dear, old friend, Dr. Mandelet, a retired, wealthy, aristocratic-like man who still tends to his devoted patients, such as the Pontellier family. He wonders if Leonce is ill. Leonce comes to speak to the doctor about his wife, for he is worried about her peculiar actions and new attitude on life. He complains that she has forgotten her housework, comes in late, and doesn't associate with anyone anymore. She is from good old Presbyterian Kentucky stock, he claims, so there can be no problem with heredity. Edna's younger sister, Janet, is to be married shortly, and the doctor thinks it a good idea to send her to it; however, Edna claims that weddings are the most lamentable spectacle on earth. The doctor begins to try and explain women, as a whole, to Mr. Pontellier.

"Woman, my dear friend, is a very peculiar and delicate organism - a sensitive and highly organized woman, such as I know Mrs. Pontellier to be, is especially peculiar. It would require an inspired psychologist to deal successfully with them. And when ordinary fellows like you and me attempt to cope with their idiosyncrasies the result is bungling. Most women are moody and whimsical. This is some passing whim of your wife, due to some cause or cause which you and I needn't try to fathom." Chapter 22, pg. 87

Topic Tracking: Feminism, Femininity and Independence 11

Mr. Pontellier is leaving for New York for business in a little bit and wonders if he should take Edna along. Dr. Mandelet tells him to leave her and to let her do what she pleases, for her mood will inevitably pass.



Edna's father is in town for a visit. He was a Colonel in the confederate army, and together, they look like a dignified family. They go to one of the Ratignolle's soirées and enjoy themselves. He wonders why Mr. Pontellier doesn't go out at night with them, and implies that if they spent more time together in the evenings, their marriage might be stronger. Edna claims that they would have nothing to say to each other at night. Edna enjoys waiting on her father and will not allow a servant to do anything that she could not do herself. Dinner is excellent, everyone tells stories of race horsing and lost loves, and drink Champagne. Doctor Mandelet grows frustrated and feels too old to be gallivanting around town as such.



Chapters 24-27

The Colonel tries to convince and persuade Edna to go to his sister's wedding, but she will not give in. He attempts to talk Mr. Pontellier into stopping at it on the way down from New York. He tells Leonce that he must be firm with his wife and that coercion is the only way to manage a wife. After her father and husband leave, Edna is left alone in the house, thrilled with her new, temporary freedom. "A feeling that was unfamiliar, but very delicious came over her" Chapter 24, pg. 95. She walks throughout the empty house, seeing things as new. After dining alone and bathing she falls asleep in a restless state of unknown.

Topic Tracking: Feminism, Femininity and Independence 12

Edna grows accustomed to her private life, needing the sun for her work and seeking friends in the society outdoors. She now understands her moods and revels in its novelty. She frequents the races, where she spends time with Mrs. Highcamp, a beautiful society woman in her forties, and Alcee Arobin, a young socialite who would prey on beautiful young women. He is charming and a great fan of Mrs. Pontellier. They spend the day together, listen to Mrs. Highcamp's piano playing, and have drinks and dinner at the Jockey Club. Arobin takes Mrs. Highcamp home while Edna writes a letter to her husband in New York, telling him of her experiences. She is enjoying her liberated life, new friends, and good food.

One day, Arobin comes to pick up Mrs. Highcamp and Edna; however, Mrs. Highcamp is preoccupied with society events for her daughter. Alcee Arobin and Edna spend the day together, talking about how close they have become, and how Arobin's life might have been different had they known each other earlier. He shows her a large scar on his wrist he received from a saber in Paris when he was 19. Alcee desperately wants to see Edna's work, but she puts off this request as long as she can.

Topic Tracking: Painting 8

She speaks to him in a way that he finds offensive and asks him to leave. Alcee begs to return to see her and does not believe that she misled him in any way. He claims her emotions did so and begins to speak so well to her heart, that he seemed to deceive himself. He kisses the back of her arm so sensually that she does not know what to do or say. Her desire is strong, but she feels guilty about the emotional deception, not to her husband, but to Robert Lebrun. "Her husband seemed to her now like a person whom she had married without love as an excuse" Chapter 25, pg. 102. After he leaves, she goes to sleep. She knows that Alcee Arobin means nothing to her; however, he has mesmerized her into thinking of nothing and no one else.

Alcee Arobin writes a sincere letter of apology to Edna. She does not truly think that a little kiss on the hands warrants such actions, but she accepts nonetheless, inviting him to watch her work. He comes over immediately and the two begin to spend almost all of their time together.



Edna visits her pianist friend and makes the declaration that she is moving out of her grand house on Esplanade Street to a smaller abode only a few steps away. She expects more of a surprise and excitement from Mademoiselle Reisz, but only receives an influx of questions. Edna has only made the decision that morning, has yet to tell her husband, but simply does not want to live in the large house with so much responsibility and no possessions that belong to only her - not her husband. "Conditions would some way adjust themselves, she felt; but whatever came, she had resolved never again to belong to another than herself" Chapter, 26, pg. 106.

Topic Tracking: Feminism, Femininity and Independence 13

Edna announces her plans to throw a grand dinner party at her husband's house before she moves, and her new friends must all come for great food, singing, and a great time. Mademoiselle Reisz lets a letter fall to the floor from Robert and Edna becomes enthralled, wondering why she did not give the letter earlier with the news that Robert is returning. She thinks it would have been unfair, since poor Robert is in love with Edna and is trying to get over her, since he could not have her. They discuss love and Edna admits for the first time that she is, in fact, in love with Robert Lebrun. She leaves Reisz's house in an exuberant mood, wondering when exactly her beloved will be returning to New Orleans, sends chocolates to her children in Iberville, and writes a letter explaining her move and farewell dinner to her husband off in New York.

Alcee Arobin comes to speak with Edna at her request, and the only topic on her mind is her conversation with Mademoiselle Reisz from earlier that day. She had placed her hands on Edna's shoulder blades and made a comment about birds being able to fly. Alcee claims to never understand any of the pianist's nonsense, while Edna thinks that she is wonderfully sane and brilliant. Alcee is excited by Edna's novel thoughts of the evening, grabs her and kisses her passionately on the lips. This mere kiss becomes a torch of fire that had been ignited and transformed into desire.



Chapters 28-30

That evening, Edna cries herself to sleep, mixed with emotions of love, of passion, guilt, pride, and awakening. She worries little of her husband, but feels remorse for her first kiss of the like not coming from love. She is trying to understand her new awakening and is shocked and thrilled by the unusual and unaccustomed nature of her desires.

Alcee visits Edna, who is cleaning with the servants in the pigeon-house, the smaller, new abode of her independent spirit. She looks ravishing to Alcee with her hair pulled back to protect it from the dust, scrubbing the grime away from the floors. She tells him to get ready for the big dinner, which he calls a *coup d'etat*, and for which she is sending the bill to Leonce, still out of town. Alcee desires her, but he must wait, for she is preoccupied with so much, including her big move and grand dinner party.

The dinner is a small, intimate affair that originally caters to twelve, but due to last minute regrets of Adele Ratignolle and Madame Lebrun, only consists of ten guests: Mr. and Mrs. Merriman, Mrs. Highcamp, Alcee Arobin, Mademoiselle Reisz, Monsieur Ratignolle, Victor Lebrun, Miss Mayblunt, a twenty-something intellectual, and her companion, Mr. Gouvernail. The table is garnished with yellow flowing material and each place setting holds a mixture of sparkling diamonds. Edna wears a new bouquet of diamonds in her hair that she announces is a gift from her husband. Today is her birthday and everyone may toast to her health for her 29th year, her sister Janet's wedding, and her father, the Colonel. Everyone falls into different conversations, distinct gossip, and keen observations of one another. Edna looks exquisite in her satin gown and lace covering. "There was something in her attitude, in her whole appearance when she leaned her head against the high-backed chair and spread her arms, which suggested the regal woman, the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone" Chapter 30, pg. 117-118.

After several hours of small talk and wonderful company, Monsieur Ratignolle excuses himself to go home to his wife at ten o'clock. He begins the exodus from Mrs. Pontellier's home, followed next by Mrs. Highcamp and Victor Lebrun, posing in the light with champagne and Mrs. Highcamp's scarf. After playful flirting and slightly inebriated laughter, Edna physically places her hand on Victor's mouth telling her to return the scarf. As he kisses her hand, she feels a passionate sting. Mrs. Highcamp gathers Victor, beckons him to call on her daughter, and leaves. Everyone else realizes that it is time to return home, except for Alcee Arobin, who remains. The voices of Edna's guests linger in the night.



Chapters 31-33

Alcee Arobin helps Edna clean up and finish the dinner. He takes her arm and walks her to the pigeon house, for her new home. When they arrive, flowers are carefully displayed throughout the main room, to his command and placed by Celestine. Edna is exhausted from all her work from the past several days, claiming that her dinner party was silly. Alcee comforts her with kind words and soft caresses. She tells him, goodnight. "He did not answer, except to continue to caress her. He did not say good night until she had become supple to his gentle, seductive entreaties" Chapter 31, pg. 123.

When Mr. Pontellier learns of his wife's departure from the house on Esplanade Street, he is angered and frustrated. He is more worried about appearances and his financial status than the actual decomposition of his marriage. He worries that the impending notoriety may detract from his business. In short time, he hires artisans to renovate the Esplanade house and publishes an article in the newspaper stating that their house is under construction and is uninhabitable while the couple takes a sojourn to Europe. He successfully saves face while still out of town.

Edna begins to feel comfortable, strong, and independent in the pigeon house. Although it is small, it allows her to see the world and her life through her own eyes, and she adores this new capability. She visits her children in Iberville, who are staying with their grandmother. She revels in this opportunity to spend time in the countryside, in a different life, telling them about the workmen in the house, and hears of all the new things in their lives. The Madame is thrilled to hear of such construction, for she can now keep her grandchildren for a longer period of time. As Edna leaves, she hears gleeful songs in her head from the children; yet, by the time she arrives at her new home, the songs are gone and she is once again, alone and independent.

Topic Tracking: Feminism, Femininity and Independence 14

In pursuit of companionship with Mademoiselle Reisz, Edna seeks the pianist's company. Unfortunately, she is nowhere to be found, so Edna returns home to work on a painting. Madame Ratignolle stops over for a visit, eager to hear about the rest of the dinner party, from which her husband left so early. She comments on Edna's solitary lifestyle and Alcee Arobin's intentions, and Edna's absence from her life. After an amiable visit, Madame Ratignolle leaves and Mrs. Merriman drops by for a party call. Edna tells everyone to disband with the formalities.

Frustrated with everyone's visits, Edna finds refuge with Mademoiselle Reisz. She waits in the empty, unpretentious house, looking around at the piano and photos. Someone knocks on the door, so Edna walks over to answer it. Robert Lebrun has returned from Mexico, and presents himself. Edna is shocked and elated, curious as to when he returned and why he has not yet come to visit her. Robert has been back since the day before yesterday and busy. Edna is hurt that he did not seek her in the first hour of his return and cannot believe Mademoiselle's words that he truly loves her. Robert only



learns of Edna's new abode yesterday from his mother and claims to have returned because the Mexicans were uncongenial.

Edna heads for the door to leave, for she believes Mademoiselle not to return until late. Robert follows her, hoping to walk her home. They pass the Pontellier mansion, under construction. Robert remarks that he never knew Edna in her home. She is happy that he did not and begs him to dine with her. He accepts and looks around the pigeon house at her sketches and old photographs. He sees one of Alcee Arobin's head and erupts. Edna informs him that he is a friend of hers and that they have been close recently. She doesn't see any reason in returning all the photographs that people have given her so that she may paint them. Edna prefers to hear about Robert's experiences in Mexico, while Robert claims that Edna is cruel. They sit in silence.

Topic Tracking: Painting 9



Chapters 34-36

Dinner continues as the two discuss Robert's trip to Mexico. Edna wants to hear about everything and comments on the tobacco pouch he carries. Robert maintains that it was made by a Vera Cruz girl he knew. They discuss her beauty and beauty of women in general in small-talk mode, not their typical banter. Edna reminds him of the time they spent together on Grand Isle, growing accustomed to one another's company. In the middle of dinner, Alcee Arobin drops in with a message from Mrs. Merriman. He is surprised to see Robert there and charmingly shows his jealousy. After Robert leaves, Alcee declares his love for Edna. Edna feels jealousy for the first time as she pictures Robert with a Mexican girl and feels more distant from him than she did while he was in Mexico.

Topic Tracking: Water/Beach 6

"She writhed with a jealous pang. She wondered when he would come back. He had not said he would come back. She had been with him, had heard his voice and touched his hand. But some way he had seemed neared to her off there in Mexico." Chapter 34, pg. 136

Edna misses Robert terribly and sees remembrances of him everywhere. He does not visit her the following day. She does, however, receive a note from Alcee Arobin. Her passings with him have become quite habitual. Mr. Pontellier writes to Edna that he will return home in March and that they may then take their trip abroad. Edna speaks of taking painting classes in Paris. Edna's sensuality is becoming awakened by her time spent with Arobin.

Topic Tracking: Painting 10

Preoccupied by Robert and her work, Edna spends much time at a cozy coffee house, in which she believes she will see nobody she knows. One day, Robert walks in. Edna claims to only see him by accident and therein they begin to discuss their personal relations and happenstance meetings. She tells him that he is the embodiment of selfishness. She cares nothing of what he thinks, for she enjoys her habit of stating exactly what is on her mind. He responds that he thinks that she is cruel and tries to force him into disclosing emotions that may or may not be real. Edna apologizes and tells him to eat his food before it gets cold.

After the meal, they walk back to the pigeon-house together. She does not ask him to stay, although he waits while she washes. When she returns, she finds him looking through her magazines and pictures. She leans over and kisses him on the lips, passionately. "She put her hand up to his face and pressed his cheek against her own. The action was full of love and tenderness. He sought her lips again. Then he drew her down upon the sofa beside him and held her hand in both of his" Chapter 36, pg. 141. Robert exclaims that now Edna understands what he has been fighting since the summer and what drove him to and from Mexico. He explains that he could not give in



to his feelings, for he was the wife of Leonce Pontellier and could not possibly be hers. He thought of her throughout his entire time in Mexico. She does not understand why he never wrote her and why he did not visit her upon his return. He explains that he could not give into his feelings. Edna overtly claims that she is neither the possession of Leonce or of Robert and will not be thought of as such. She kisses him all over and tells him he has been a foolish boy, for the two love each other deeply.

Celestine enters with one of Madame Ratignolle's servants. She is ill and requests Edna's presence. Robert offers to walk her over, but she declines his invitation. She wants to go alone, but hopes for him to wait for her. She tells him that she loves him and that nothing else matters in the world. He begs her to stay, but she leaves, telling him that she will return as soon as she can, and that they will soon be together. "Her seductive voice, together with his great love for her, had enthralled his sense, had deprived him of every impulse but the longing to hold her and keep her" Chapter 36, pg. 142.



Chapters 37-39

When Edna arrives at the Ratignolle home, Monsieur is waiting in the drugstore, thrilled to see her. He tells her that Doctor Mandelet is excessively late and must be replaced. Edna feels unnecessary, but does not leave. She goes inside to say goodbye to her dear friend. She looks ill, with her hair strewn and fallen down and beads of sweat appear over her forehead. Adele whispers in Edna's ears to think of the children.

Doctor Mandelet walks with Edna in the cool, spring, night air, telling her that she should not have been there - it was cruel. Edna shrugs off his comments speaking of the children and thinking of everything else ahead of her. He inquires about Leonce and their pending trip abroad. Edna declares that she is not going with him and will not be forced into doing anything that she does not want to do. She thinks no one, except for children, should be made to do something that is not desirable. He advises her, but understands, and bids good night.

As Edna returns to her pigeon-house, her expectancy and excitement of being with Robert, awakening him with a kiss, overtakes her entire being. Her desire for Robert conflicts with Adele's final words to remember the children. She does not care and only wants to be with her love. However, when she enters the parlor, Robert is nowhere to be found. He has left a note. "I love you. Good-by - because I love you" Chapter 38, pg. 148. Edna feels faint, throws herself on the sofa, and sits there in complete silence for the remainder of the night in horrific shock and pain.

Victor Lebrun patches a corner of the gallery with a hammer and nails, next to Mariequita, speaking highly and persistently of the glorious dinner party thrown by Mrs. Pontellier. Edna believes him to be in love with her, and knows that she could run off with any man of her choice. She teases him and walks around the corner hoping to rest.

While waiting for dinner, Edna decides to dip her feet into the water at the beach and rushes off to gather towels from Victor. She does not think of anything, for any thought that could possibly run through her mind, did so the night Robert abandoned her on the sofa. In her head, she ponders her life. She knows that she can have Arobin today and someone else tomorrow. It matters little to her. Leonce matters little to her. Her children do matter and suddenly she remembers what Adele meant when they spoke of sacrifice for their children. She could never do so. She only wants to be with Robert and nothing else matters at this point. She thinks only of him as she walks to the ocean, forgetting Raul and Etienne.

"The water of the Gulf stretched out before her, gleaming with the million lights of the sun. The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude. All along the white beach, up and down, there was no living thing in sight. A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water." Chapter 39, pg. 151-152



Topic Tracking: Water/Beach 7

She sees her old bathing suit hanging, faded, on the peg. Instead of dressing, she removes her clothing and stands in front of the ocean, naked as a baby awakening its eyes into a new world. She walks toward the waves, despite the cold wetness thrashing upon her delicate skin. She continues to swim out far into the ocean and remembers the time long ago when she was frightened in the deep water. She is not afraid and continues out farther and farther. Although her body is becoming tired with exhaustion, thoughts of Leonce and the children play in her mind. She hears Mademoiselle Reisz speak of pretentious artists, wondering if she is one. She heard Robert read his note saying "Goodbye - because I love you." She thinks he never understood her feelings, that nobody, perhaps with the exception of Doctor Mandelet, could understand her. However, it is too late to inquire, for she is too far out from shore and exhausted.

"She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again. Edna heard her father's voice and her sister Margaret's. She heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air." Chapter 39, pg. 153

Topic Tracking: Water/Beach 8