



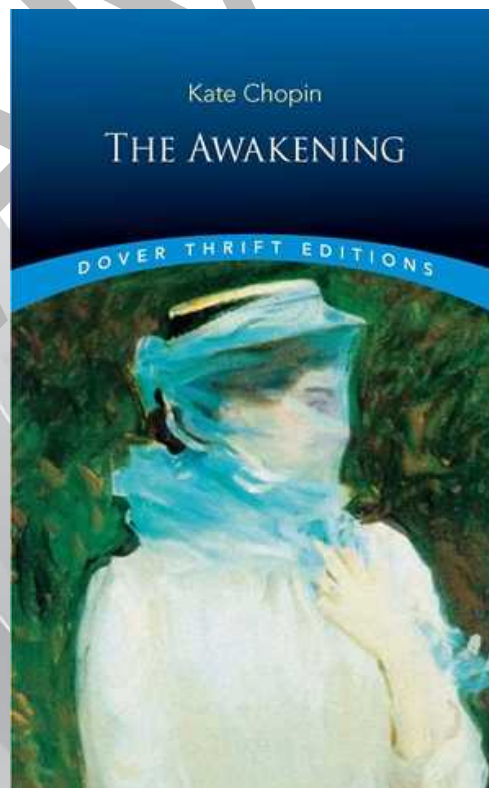
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Awakening

Kate Chopin



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Awakening

Kate Chopin

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Compare/contrast, research, brainstorming, analysis, critical thinking

Literary Elements

Characterization, personification, simile, metaphor, theme, foreshadowing, symbolism

Writing

Poetry, prose, sequel, eulogy, newspaper article, letter essay

Vocabulary

Target words, definitions, application

Comprehension

Predicting, inference, cause/effect, plot development, thematic development

Across the Curriculum

Art—collage, sketch, caricature; Music; Drama

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, poetry, music

Genre: fiction

Setting: Grand Isle; New Orleans, Louisiana; late 1800s

Date: first published in 1899

Point of View: third-person omniscient

Style: narrative

Themes: self-discovery, solitude, escape, sexuality

Conflict: self vs. self, self vs. conformity

Protagonist: Edna Pontellier

Antagonist: Edna Pontellier's quest to find herself

Summary

While vacationing with her family on Grand Isle, Edna Pontellier begins her self-discovery and an "awakening" to her own sexuality. Her two closest female friends, Adèle Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz, each add an individual touch to Edna's increasing self-awareness. Her husband, Léonce, loves her and is kind and considerate, but he is preoccupied with his own pursuits. They have two small children, Étienne and Raoul. Edna and Robert Lebrun fall in love, but Robert leaves Grand Isle rather than compromise Edna's position as a married woman. After Edna returns to New Orleans, she moves into her own house away from her family and has an affair with Alcée Arobin, a young man noted for his seductive powers. Robert's return seems the answer to Edna's dreams, but his adherence to conventionality will not allow them to be together. Faced with an overwhelming despondency, Edna returns to Grand Isle and swims to her death in the ocean.

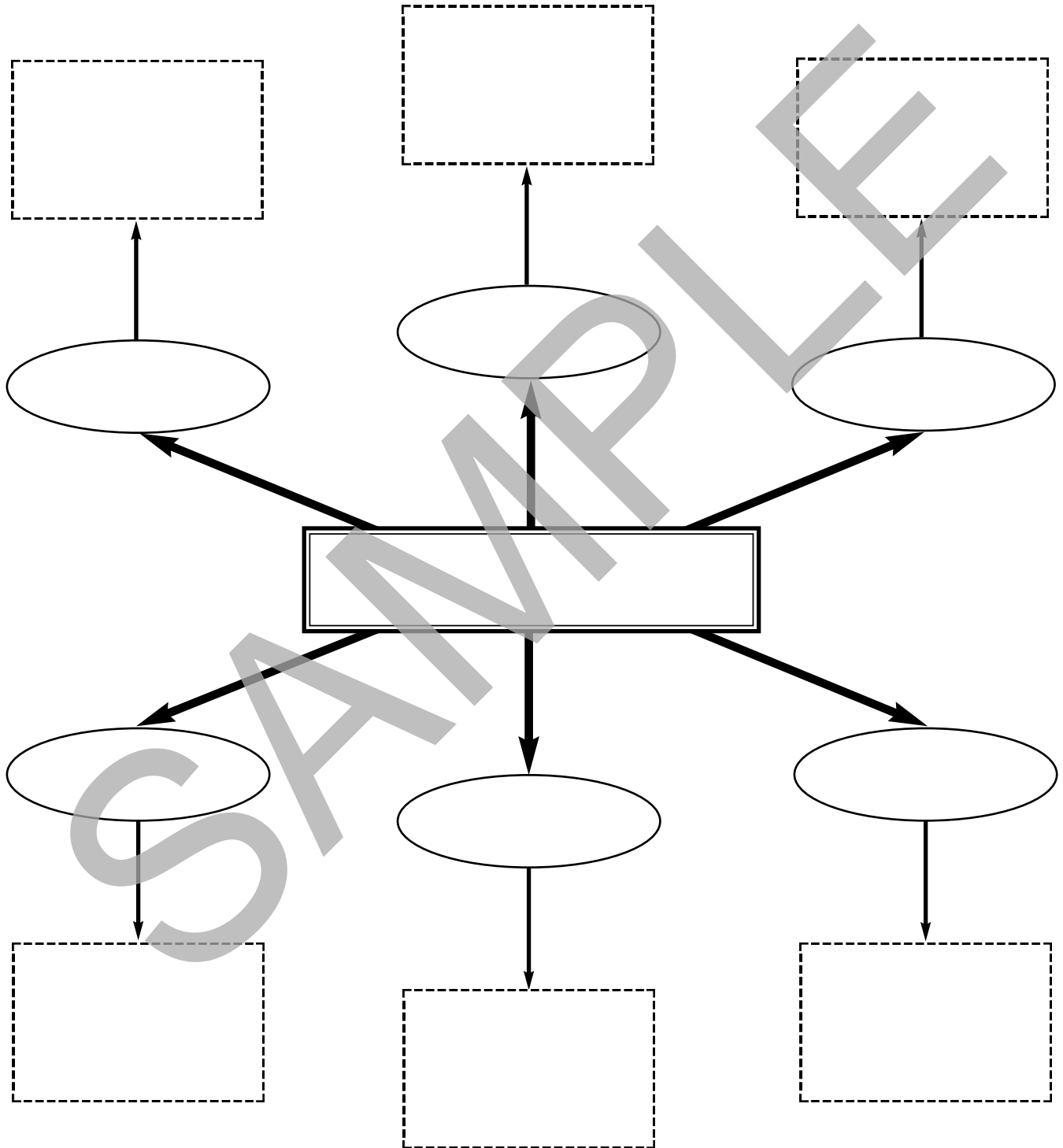
Background Information

Chopin wrote *The Awakening* at the close of the nineteenth century. The novel portrays the social and religious restrictions society placed on women during this era. Chopin is noted as the first American female novelist to write candidly about the feelings of women toward their roles as wives and mothers and their suppressed emotional and sexual needs. Chopin, born in 1850, observed the development of the women's rights movement during its first half-century. *The Awakening* is set in Louisiana, the only state that operated under a legal system based on the Napoleonic code of France. Under the Louisiana code, a woman belonged to her husband, the male had absolute control over the family, and married women were considered incompetent to make a contract and were equated with babies and the mentally ill.

The world's first convention for women's rights, held in New York in 1848, ushered in the Women's Rights Movement. Sixty-eight women and 32 men signed a Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions. Highlights of the movement include: 1849—publication of the first prominent women's

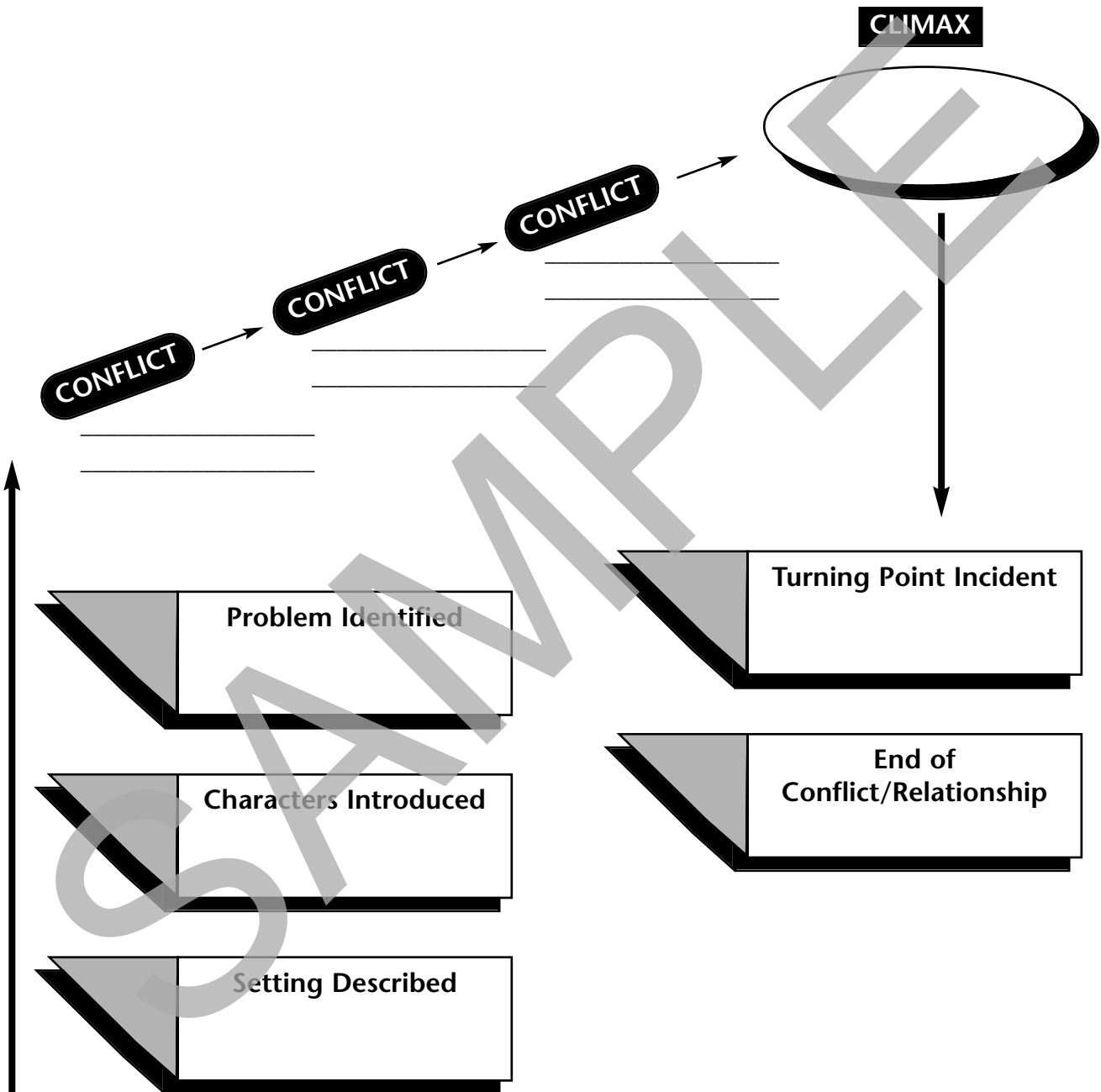
Characterization

Directions: Write a main character's name in the center. Place in each oval an adjective that describes him/her. Fill in each rectangle with a detail that illustrates the quality in the novel.



Story Map

Directions: Fill in each box below with information about the novel.



Chapters I-IV

While vacationing with her family on Grand Isle, Edna Pontellier meets and engages in friendly rapport with Robert Lebrun. Edna and her husband, Léonce, conflict over her parenting skills.

Vocabulary

quadroon (6)	gaunt (7)	languor (9)	evinced (12)
peignoir (13)	tacit (14)	encumbrance (16)	diminutive (17)
insidious (17)	impervious (18)	prudery (19)	droll (19)

Discussion Questions

1. Using the plot diagram (page 7 of this guide) on an overhead transparency, discuss the exposition of the novel, noting the introduction of the characters, the identification of the setting, and clues to the situation. Continue using the diagram as the plot unfolds. (*Characters: Edna and Léonce Pontellier, their children Étienne and Raoul, Robert Lebrun, Madame Lebrun, the lady in black, Adèle Ratignolle; Setting: Grand Isle, off the Gulf coast of Louisiana, late 1890s; Situation: stress and dissatisfaction in the Pontelliers' marriage, Robert Lebrun's rapport with Edna. pp. 5-19*)
2. Note the parrot's repetitive words and discuss their meaning. (*This phrase foreshadows the danger of Edna's liaison with Robert Lebrun and her eventual "escape" by suicide. She should "get out" before the situation ever begins; she will discover that only through death can she escape. p. 5*)
3. Analyze the relationship between Edna and Léonce Pontellier. Note Mr. Pontellier's remark to his wife, "You are burnt beyond recognition," followed by his looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage (p. 7). Discuss the stereotypical roles of husband and wife in the Pontelliers' marriage during this era. (*Their marriage reveals signs of dissatisfaction. Léonce views Edna as his personal property and wants her to fit the ideal pattern of a wife whose primary concerns are her husband and her children. He tells her what to do and when to do it. He shows displeasure toward her parenting skills and is distressed because he thinks she has little interest in things that concern him and does not value his conversation. He views his role as primarily responsible for the finances, and he comes and goes as he pleases, i.e., to the "game" at Klein's and his "escape" back to work in New Orleans. Edna has tried to fill the typical role but is frustrated and often lonely and depressed, crying alone in despair. Léonce seems oblivious to Edna's emotional needs but is generous with gifts. pp. 5-15*)
4. Examine Léonce Pontellier's dissatisfaction with Edna. Compare/contrast Edna with Adèle Ratignolle and other "mother-women." (*He feels rather than perceives that she is not the "good" mother he wants his sons to have. For example, if one of the boys falls, he does not rush to his mother for comfort but picks himself up and goes on playing. The "mother-women" flutter about, protect their children from harm, worship their husbands, and consider it a privilege to efface their own personalities in order to become good wives and mothers. Léonce sees little of these traits in Edna. Adèle Ratignolle is beautiful, is constantly sewing for her children, and adores her husband. She embodies every grace and charm Léonce believes a woman should possess. Edna expects her children to be more self-sufficient, does not want to spend her summer vacation sewing, and is rather disinterested in her husband's concerns. pp. 16-19*)

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5. Examine the meaning of “There rested no shadow of care upon his (Robert’s) countenance” (p. 9). (*He is completely relaxed and carefree since coming to Grand Isle for his summer vacation from his job in a mercantile house. He is enjoying the beauty of the day and his conversation with Edna Pontellier. By inference, he anticipates their budding relationship. pp. 9-11*)

Supplementary Activities

1. Have students write name poems for Edna and Léonce Pontellier.
2. Have a student research the background of the Creoles and report to the class.
3. Guide students to locate the literary devices as they read the novel: **Metaphors**—umbrella: sunshade (p. 8); “mother-women”: hens protecting their brood (p. 16) **Similes**—It (Edna’s oppression) was like a shadow, like a mist passing across her soul’s summer day (p. 14); two small eyes might look out...like an Eskimo’s (p. 17).

Chapters V-VII

The relationship between Edna and Robert deepens but does not culminate in an affair. Edna begins to experience self-awareness. Edna reveals to Adèle much of her early life and her marriage.

Vocabulary

vouchsafe (20)
candor (26)

näiveté (21)
propensity (31)

sensuous (22)
acme (32)

sonorous (24)

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss Robert Lebrun and his “role” on Grand Isle. Examine his relationship with Edna. (*He is twenty-six, and each summer for the past eleven years he has devoted his attentions to a specific lady, i.e., a young girl, a widow, or a married woman. Following the death of one of his pursuits, he sought consolation from and developed a passion for Adèle Ratignolle, who enjoyed his company but remained devoted to her husband. Robert now devotes his attention to Edna, who delights in his companionship but repels any overt advances. pp. 20-24*)
2. Analyze the simile, “Mrs. Pontellier liked to gaze at her fair companion as she might look upon a faultless Madonna” (p. 20). (*Responses may vary as to whom Edna directs her gaze. Edna responds to Adèle’s goodness and beauty, or perhaps she is intrigued by Robert’s youthfulness and his handsome looks. She views her companion as faultless, much as the Madonna—Mother of Jesus Christ—is pure and faultless.*)
3. Analyze Edna’s two contradictory impulses and what this reveals about her. (*She recognizes the beginning of her self-discovery and senses a certain light dawning within her, revealing her unique place in the universe. Her reflections reveal that, even as a child, she lived a dual life: an outward conformity but an inward questioning. During the summer on Grand Isle, she begins to free herself from the cloak of reserve that has always covered her. pp. 25-26*)