

Essentials in Literature
Level 10
Textbook Samples

Characters

Plot revolves around characters' actions, and conflict revolves around characters' struggles. **Main characters** are central to a plot and vital to the central conflict, while **minor characters** move the plot along but are not fundamental to the story.

In the Pirates of the Caribbean movies, Captain Jack Sparrow is the protagonist of the story, but he is also a thief, a liar, and a drunk. He is the focus, but he is not a hero.

Main characters can be protagonists or antagonists. A **protagonist** is the focus of a story because the plot follows their actions, and an **antagonist** opposes the protagonist in a conflict. Sometimes a protagonist is called a hero, but the protagonist is not always a good person.

When studying fiction, special categories can be useful when analyzing characters. These categories are **dynamic**, **static**, **flat**, and **round**. Main characters are almost always round, but minor characters can be round or flat. Generally—but not always—main characters are also dynamic in some way.

Dynamic Character

A dynamic character changes during the course of a story. Their emotions, actions, or mindsets undergo some kind of transformation.

Static Character

A static character does not change. They remain the same person at the end of the story as they were at the beginning.

Flat Character

A flat character is uncomplicated, and the reader learns very little about them. They are sometimes used to simply move the plot along.

Round Character

A round character is developed and complex. A reader gets to know them, their past, thoughts, and feelings in depth.

Traits and Motives

Characters are defined by their traits.

traits: defining qualities, characteristics, and personality features

Characters are driven by their motives.

motives: reasons characters take certain actions

D

Drama

Reading is an individual experience. Even if thousands of people read the same book or short story, they will each process the story through their own individual imaginations. Drama, on the other hand, is a community experience. Not only does it require a community of people to produce a theatrical production, but playgoers will experience the drama as a group—as one audience.

As a genre of literature, drama is a play for the theater, radio, or film (but this unit explores theater). A playwright crafts a story into a script, which is then interpreted by directors and designers and performed by actors and actresses, all funded and governed by a producer. Sets are constructed, costumes are created, and sometimes music and sound effects are used during a production.

To produce a drama, a large group of people work together to create an immersive experience that takes place in real time in a 3-D setting that appeals to physical senses as well as imagination.

The audience (playgoers) is also a vital part of the theatrical experience. After meeting the characters at the start of the play, the audience starts to look for the solution to whatever

When attending a drama, people get the chance to come together, laugh as a unit, cry collectively, and experience all the tension and emotion of a story as one group.

problem is introduced. The audience creeps to the edge of their seats as tension builds, and they hold their breath as the climax breaks upon them. Then, everyone can finally breathe again, and they are prepared to reenter the real world—hopefully impacted for the better—as the play closes.

Plays are not short stories; they are meant to be performed, not simply read. The script is only a starting point. Reading a play will not provide the same immersive experience as attending a live production, but a drama can still be appreciated and analyzed by reading its script.



Analyzing Literature

Situational Irony

Situational irony occurs in literature when the expected outcome of a situation is different than the actual outcome. Often, information is introduced in a story that leads the reader or the characters to expect a certain conclusion. If what actually happens is different than what was expected, the result is known as situational irony.

Identifying ironic events helps the reader make distinctions between expectations and reality.

Record what you expected to happen following the excerpt below. Then, record what actually happened.

Background Information/Events

The children sneak out and find Atticus sitting alone in front of the Maycomb jail. Soon, a large group of men arrive in cars and approach Atticus, staying out of the light. They demand for Atticus to turn Tom Robinson over and inform him that they sent the sheriff out into the woods on a misinformed chase.

Situational Irony

Outcome You Expected

Actual Outcome

Analyzing Literature activity provided in the Resource Book on page 72.

DIVE DEEPER

- Know** – Motive is someone’s reason for taking action. What is Aunt Alexandria’s motivation for coming to live in the Finch household? How do you know?
- Analyze** – What conclusion can you draw from the following excerpt?

“–don’t see why you touched it in the first place,” Mr. Link Deas was saying. “You’ve got everything to lose from this, Atticus. I mean everything.”

SYMBOLISM

Symbolism is the use of symbols to convey a deeper or hidden meaning.

Is a **symbol** present in the third section of *To Kill a Mockingbird*? If so, what might it represent?

Villanelle

A villanelle is a poem with nineteen lines separated into five *tercets* and one *quatrain*. This form does not have a fixed meter per line but does require a specific rhyme scheme and repeating pattern.

Repeated lines called **refrains** can be exact or near exact copies.

Free Verse

A free verse is a poem that does not adhere to a specific rhyme or meter. Free verse has become a popular mode of expression in modern times as it is an excellent form to use when expressing personal thoughts, feelings, or experiences.

“When I Heard The Learn’d Astronomer”

by Walt Whitman

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
 When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
 When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
 When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in
 the lecture-room,
 How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
 Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
 In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
 Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

Villanelle basic form:

(Refrain #1)	a
(line)	b
(Refrain #2)	a
(line)	a
(line)	b
(Refrain #1)	a
(line)	a
(line)	b
(Refrain #2)	a
(line)	a
(line)	b
(Refrain #1)	a
(line)	a
(line)	b
(Refrain #2)	a
(line)	a
(line)	b
(Refrain #1)	a
(Refrain #2)	a

Ode

a short lyrical poem that is serious in tone and subject matter.

Elegy

a poem of lamentation and mourning that honors someone who has died.

Ballad

a poem that narrates a story, typically with short stanzas, often accompanied by music.

Epic

a twelve-part narrative poem with a heroic main character who goes on a fantastic adventure.

“The Yellow Wallpaper”
section from Fiction Unit

Accompanying activity
sheets from the
Resource Book and the
Independent Practice

F

The Yellow Wallpaper



Day 1: Before You Read

WHAT TO LEARN?

- Irony
- Drawing Conclusions
- Vocabulary
- Independent Practice

American Literature



When people don't **UNDERSTAND**

Problems and feelings can be difficult to express. When someone cannot properly express how they feel, that person may think they are unable to ask for help. This can lead to believing that they are alone, even if they are surrounded by other people.

When a person does ask for help, sometimes other people simply do not understand. They might discredit one's problems or feelings, saying they are not serious or even real. Other times, they might offer bad advice to deal with the issues. This can lead to a feeling of hopelessness in the one who is suffering.

Dealing with internal problems is not hopeless, however, and people who struggle are not alone. Finding the proper help and not giving up is key. When a person isolates themselves, for one reason or another, the problems can increase. "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman is a story of someone who is given bad advice, isolates herself, and suffers for it.

Meet the Author

Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Social Reformer

Through her lifestyle and her writing, Gilman sought to change the way women were viewed and treated in her time. She argued against locking women into only "domestic roles"—meaning their sole purpose in life is to cook, clean, and raise children, with nothing concerning professional, intellectual, or creative pursuits.

A Struggle with Depression

As she was already susceptible to depression, living a sheltered married life and suffering from serious postpartum depression after giving birth pushed Gilman's sanity to the breaking point. "The Yellow Wallpaper" is a fictional account of Gilman's experience battling mental illness, which was mistreated by the doctors of her time. Although she did recover, Gilman writes that she was never truly the same.

July 3, 1860–Aug 17, 1935





Analyzing Literature

Irony

In literature, **irony** is a contrast or inconsistency between expectations and reality. Irony can be divided into three main categories:

- **Verbal Irony**—when something a character says is different than what the character means
- **Situational Irony**—when the outcome of a situation is different than what was expected
- **Dramatic Irony**—when the audience knows something the characters in a story do not know

Dramatic irony often results in either humor or powerful suspense. Characters in a story are not always aware of the thoughts and actions of other characters, but the reader is aware of them. This can happen when the author writes a scene that does not contain some of the characters or when the author provides insight into a character's inner thoughts. Dramatic irony occurs when the characters in a story make decisions based on their limited knowledge, but only the reader understands if these decisions are right or wrong.

For example, at the end of Shakespeare's play about the unfortunate lovers *Romeo and Juliet*, the audience knows that Juliet is faking her death so that she can run away and be with Romeo. Unfortunately, Romeo does not have this knowledge. Romeo kills himself to be united with Juliet in death, thus frustrating the audience and demonstrating dramatic irony.

Reading Focus: drawing conclusions

In fiction, not everything is explicitly stated. To create suspense or mystery, authors may include only hints for the reader to piece together. Combining these hints with one's knowledge of reality or the rest of the story is **drawing conclusions** about things that are not clearly revealed in the text.

Details from the Story	My Knowledge	My Conclusion
"John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage."	People laugh at others when they think they are foolish.	John thinks his wife is foolish, and the narrator thinks this is normal.

Reading Focus activity provided in the Resource Book on page 21.

Vocabulary

Familiarize yourself with the words listed on the right before reading "The Yellow Wallpaper." Use a dictionary to find their definitions. As you read "The Yellow Wallpaper," look for these words and pay attention to how the narrator uses them. Would you use such words in your personal journal?

felicity
lurid
draught
atrocious
conspicuous
querulous
undulating
arabesque
conscientiously



Check Comprehension

1. **What** is happening to the narrator as the story goes on?
2. **What** does the narrator think she sees behind the yellow wallpaper and out in the open country?
3. **Why** does the narrator tear at the wallpaper at the end of the story?

Think Critically

Scholars often compare the horror of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" with the horror of Edgar Allan Poe's writings, such as "The Raven," "The Masque of the Red Death," and "The Cask of Amontillado." These Poe stories were intended to excite terror within the reader.

Based on your reading of "The Yellow Wallpaper" and your knowledge of Gilman's history, do you think this story is primarily meant to disturb readers? If not, does the story have another purpose? If so, what do you think the purpose is?

Write an organized paragraph explaining your answer.

After you understand
what happens in a story and
why it happens, ask yourself,
what's the point?

Main Idea

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is a fictional story based on Charlotte Gilman's real life experience. The narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper"—like many women in the author's time period—is instructed by multiple doctors to seclude herself and be inactive in order to remedy her "nervous depression."

A

Considering what happens to the narrator when she follows this prescription, what do you think is the main idea of "The Yellow Wallpaper," the most important point made by the story? In one complete sentence, describe what you think is the main point of this story.

B

Considering that this story was written in the late 1800s and reflects how women were treated at that time, think about whether or not this story can apply to modern readers. In one complete sentence, describe why "The Yellow Wallpaper" does or does not have something to offer to modern readers.

Analyzing Literature

Irony

In literature, **irony** is a contrast or inconsistency between expectations and reality.

Dramatic irony is when the audience knows something the characters in a story do not know. Characters in a story are not always aware of the thoughts and actions of other characters, but the reader is aware of them. Dramatic irony occurs when characters make decisions based on their limited knowledge, but only the reader understands if these decisions are right or wrong.

The dramatic irony in “The Yellow Wallpaper” occurs primarily because the narrator does not realize she is losing her mind, but the reader slowly comes to this understanding. Even as the story is filtered through the narrator’s unbalanced mind, the reader understands that how the narrator describes things is not necessarily how they truly are. Also, sometimes the other characters believe one thing, but the opposite is true.

Identify points in “The Yellow Wallpaper” that demonstrate dramatic irony. Record how the narrator explains a situation and what the true explanation is.

What is the situation?	How does this demonstrate dramatic irony?
<i>John believes that letting the narrator spend most of her time resting in the room with yellow wallpaper is helping the narrator recover.</i>	<i>Being in the room with yellow wallpaper is not helping the narrator recover; it is, in fact, worsening her condition.</i>

Analyzing Literature activity provided in the Resource Book on page 22.

DIVE DEEPER

- Apply – Symbolism** is when something in a story represents something else. If you were to choose something from the story that acted as a symbol, what would you choose? Explain your answer.
- Analyze** – Does the yellow wallpaper cause the narrator’s madness, or is her reaction to the paper an effect of her madness? Support your answer.
- Evaluate – Conflict** can be **external** (between one character and another) or **internal** (between a character and their own mind). Determine which is greater in this story: the internal or external conflict. How do you know?



Analyzing Literature

The view from which a story is told is called its **point of view**. When a story is told in **first-person** point of view, the reader must understand that the information they are given is filtered through the narrator's mind.

1. In “The Yellow Wallpaper,” is the first-person narrator **reliable**? That is, is the information presented through the narrator always accurate? Why or why not?
2. How would this story have been different if it were told in **third-person** point of view? Support your answer with specific examples.

Connection Reflection

3. The narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” was told to seclude herself and be inactive to help her condition. Unfortunately, this advice only worsened her problems. What do you think would have actually helped her?
4. The narrator writes that she tried to explain to others that there was something wrong with her. John, however, “does not believe [she] is sick!” Suppose a friend or family member came to you and shared that they feel like something is wrong, even though they appear healthy. How would you respond?

Writing Connection

“The Yellow Wallpaper” is written as a series of journal entries from the narrator. Because of this, most of the story is spent describing the inner workings of the narrator's mind—what she feels, thinks, and imagines. Occasionally, she describes some action or a conversation she had with another character.

If her husband John kept a similar kind of journal, what would his entries look like? Write one journal entry (or more, if you choose) from John's perspective that takes place at the same time as the entries of “The Yellow Wallpaper.” Consider what is going on in John's mind, what he sees, and how he would explain his wife's behavior.

Try to include the same things that the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” included in her journal entries. Record actions John witnesses, conversations he has or overhears, and something that is occupying his mind.



Nonfiction Connection

Article

Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" describes doctors who misunderstand mental health issues. The narrator's husband John insists that the narrator does not have a real problem because she is physically healthy. He will not listen to her arguments otherwise, but the end of the story clearly shows that John was wrong.

Mindsets about mental health have changed significantly since the publication of "The Yellow Wallpaper" in the 1890s. People who struggle with internal problems, such as anxiety and depression, are taken much more seriously than they have been in the past. Anxiety and depression are different than the hysteria and mild schizophrenia displayed by the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper"; however, both are valid mental health issues that need to be addressed.

Look up **Mental Health America's online article "Depression in Teens."**

As you read,

- create a list of possible symptoms of depression in teens.
- create a list of how the article encourages people to avoid depression as well as how to deal with already onset depression.

After you read, compare the lists you created from the article with the story "The Yellow Wallpaper." What similarities or differences are there between the narrator's behavior and the symptoms of depression? How does the advice of the doctors in "The Yellow Wallpaper" differ from the advice in the Mental Health America article?

Write an organized paragraph explaining your answers or discuss your answers with your teacher or fellow students.

Extended Activities

Research – Research how mental health has been viewed in the past as well as how it is viewed now. Use the internet or books to find information and record your findings on a sheet of paper.

Art – The narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" spends a majority of the story describing the strange pattern on the walls of her bedroom. Based on the narrator's descriptions, create a design for the wallpaper. An exact replica of what the narrator describes may not be possible, for the narrator's descriptions are often tainted with insanity, but do your best to create a design for the yellow wallpaper.



Complete the Independent Practice on page 23 of the Resource Book.

Reading Focus: Drawing Conclusions

In fiction, not everything is explicitly stated. To create suspense or mystery, authors may include only hints for readers to piece together. Combining these hints with one’s knowledge of reality or the rest of the story is **drawing conclusions** about things that are not clearly revealed in the text.

In the chart below, record details that are confusing or seem important to the story, add what you know about this detail in the story or in life, and then draw your own conclusion.

Details from the Story	My Knowledge	My Conclusion
<i>“John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage.”</i>	<i>People laugh at others when they think they are foolish.</i>	<i>John thinks his wife is foolish, and the narrator thinks this is normal.</i>

Analyzing Literature: Irony

After you read “The Yellow Wallpaper,” analyze the dramatic irony present in the story. Consider the short story as a whole. Also remember that the narrator is losing her mind, so she does not always explain everything as it really is.

Identify points in “The Yellow Wallpaper” that demonstrate dramatic irony. Record how the narrator explains a situation and what the true explanation is. Some details from the story have already been recorded for you.

What is the situation?	How does this demonstrate dramatic irony?
<i>The narrator believes the wallpaper is torn, the bed is gnawed, and the windows are barred because the room used to house very rowdy children.</i>	
<i>The narrator says John and Jennie are acting very strangely toward the yellow wallpaper.</i>	
<i>The narrator declares, “I’m feeling so much better!”</i>	

Independent Practice

“The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Multiple Choice _____ / 30 points

Identify the choice that best finishes the statement or answers the question.

- _____ 1. True or False: The narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” is a mother.
- A. True
 - B. False
- _____ 2. The three types of irony are
- A. acute, obtuse, and right.
 - B. particular, general, and irrelevant.
 - C. verbal, situational, and dramatic.
 - D. literary, cinematic, and social.
- _____ 3. Which statement is closest to the main idea of “The Yellow Wallpaper”?
- A. Doctors cannot be trusted to give accurate advice.
 - B. Mental health problems should be taken seriously.
 - C. Certain decorative color schemes cause madness.
 - D. Women should be allowed to write if they want to.
- _____ 4. At the beginning of the story, the description of the torn wallpaper and the barred windows is an example of
- A. foreshadowing.
 - B. symbolism.
 - C. figurative language.
 - D. objectivity.
- _____ 5. Why does the narrator think Jennie is acting queer?
- A. Because Jennie is spending all her time with the baby.
 - B. Because the narrator caught Jennie looking at the wallpaper.
 - C. Because of something John said.
 - D. Because the narrator thinks Jennie is going mad.
- _____ 6. The definition of dramatic irony is
- A. when something a character says is different than what the character means.
 - B. when the outcome of a situation is different than what was expected.

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- C. when the audience knows something the characters in a story do not know.
- D. when a stage play is better than critics expected.

_____ 7. Which of the following words *best* applies to the narrator?

- A. Bitter
- B. Objective
- C. Foolish
- D. Unreliable

_____ 8. The imaginary woman that the narrator seeks to release from the wallpaper is symbolic for

- A. the narrator's madness.
- B. the faulty medical procedures of the author's time.
- C. the way John doesn't listen to his wife.
- D. the narrator's desire for a divorce.

_____ 9. John's many assertions that he knows best are examples of

- A. irony.
- B. foreshadowing.
- C. internal conflict.
- D. symbolism.

_____ 10. True or False: Throughout the story, John has no idea that his wife is feeling at all poorly.

- A. True
- B. False

_____ 11. How does the setting affect the conflict in the story?

- A. The narrator is in a place with so many people that she goes mad.
- B. The house is where the narrator experienced a tragedy in her childhood.
- C. The narrator is often isolated in a room that distresses her mind.
- D. The house is haunted by the ghost of Shakespeare's sister.

_____ 12. *I see [the woman from the wallpaper] on that long road under the trees, creeping along, and when a carriage comes she hides under the blackberry vines. I don't blame her a bit. It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight! I always lock the door when I creep by daylight.*

What does this excerpt from near the end of the story reveal to the reader?

- A. The narrator has a neighbor who creeps in their yard.
- B. The narrator is seeing things and behaving strangely.

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- C. Creeping was a social norm in the 1800s.
- D. The narrator is trying to pinpoint the cause of her madness.

_____ 13. Which of the following *best* describes the author's purpose in writing "The Yellow Wallpaper"?

- A. To entertain readers by making them be afraid of going mad.
- B. To persuade readers to ignore the advice of doctors.
- C. To persuade women to distrust their husbands.
- D. To inform readers about the danger of mistreating mental problems.

_____ 14. _____ is demonstrated in the story because the reader is aware that the narrator is going mad, but the narrator does not realize this.

- A. Character development
- B. Situational irony
- C. Internal conflict
- D. Dramatic irony

_____ 15. At the very end of the story, what does the narrator do?

- A. She faints and falls to the floor.
- B. She jumps out the window.
- C. She crawls around the edge of her bedroom.
- D. She leaves for home with her husband.

Constructed Responses _____ / 20 points

1. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," the narrator's husband John does not appear in the most favorable light. Based on your analysis of the story, how would you describe John's character? What do you think motivates him to act the way he does?

2. Some people think the final image of the narrator crawling over her husband's unconscious body is too disturbing. Do you think using this visual is the best way to end the story? If so, why? If not, what do you think is a better way to end the story and why?