

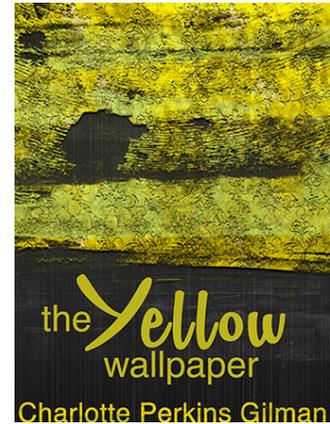


The Yellow Wallpaper

by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

[Things To Know/ Things To Think About](#)

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" has come to be viewed as a staple of prototypical feminism. Her celebrated short-story is told through a series of journal entries by an unnamed female protagonist, who, along with her physician husband, John, retires to a country estate as a prescribed cure for her "slight hysterical tendency." Although the story is written in the tradition of psychological realism, the psyche being explored is one distorted by mental illness. The result is an eerie psychological portrait where the mundane and banal merge with the seemingly phantasmic. To her credit, Gilman is not only interested in exploring a mind on the verge of unhingement, but also in exploring the antecedent causes that brought the mind to this state. For Gilman, these causes are societal, and subtle--products of an inherently oppressive patriarchal culture. John, the protagonist's husband, is the embodiment of this patriarchal culture. By providing a snapshot of the relationship between husband and wife, Gilman explores, on a microscale, the way men and women relate to each other in 19th century society.



Significantly, John is not only the protagonist's husband, but also her physician. The result is a marriage characterized by benevolent sexism masked as paternalism. Despite his wife's protests, John, with his condescending air of authority, treats her illness with endless bedrest, and a cessation of all mental and physical stimulation. Instead of improving her condition, his treatment seems to exacerbate it. By her own account, the protagonist is a creative and thoughtful soul that craves intellectual stimulation, and human interaction. Under her husband's care, however, she receives neither. Paradoxically, Gilman suggests that the protagonist's illness is actually caused by her relationship with her husband, and later, becomes aggravated by his treatment. Confined to a domestic sphere, with no creative outlet besides brief stints of writing, the narrator's attention is drawn to the yellow wallpaper adorning the walls of her bed chamber. Deprived of any form of mental life, the narrator begins to construct a deluded narrative around her wallpaper, a narrative which soon becomes inextricable from her own. This piece is ideal as

part of a lesson on women in the 19th century, or the art of short story writing. Furthermore, this piece is well suited for a lesson on gender relations, or the psychology of mental illness.

Standards Addressed:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.9

Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.

Before Reading

1. Based on your own knowledge of women in the 19th century, how would you characterize the relationship between husbands and wives at that time? What type of roles were married couples expected to play? How do these roles compare to those adopted by men and women today?

During Reading

1. How would you describe John’s attitude towards his wife? And how does John’s wife, in turn, view her husband? Cite examples from the text to support your answer.
(CSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1)
2. Through a series of journal entries, the narrator inadvertently chronicles the progression of her mental illness. How does the narrator’s illness worsen over the course of the text? Using examples, describe the way her illness develops over the course of the story
(CSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2)

After Reading

1. Although its never explicitly stated, what recent major life event experienced by the narrator could possibly be linked to her illness? More importantly, what are the implications of this possible relationship?
(CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1)
2. In the beginning of the story, the narrator remarks “John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage.” In your opinion, what did the author intend to convey through this quote. Additionally, how does this quote establish the tone of the relationship between husband and wife for the remainder of the story?
(CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4)

Connections In Text

1. Compare the portrayal of mental illness in “The Yellow wallpaper” to the portrayal of mental illness in a short story, of your choosing, by Edgar Allan Poe. How are these portrayals of mental illness similar and different? In addition, describe the way the author’s writing style impacts the reader’s perception of the illness in question.
(CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.9)

Further Readings

For Teachers:

<http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1999/1/99.01.07.x.html>

Provides an excellent interpretation of “The Yellow Wallpaper” through the lens of gothic fiction.

For Students:

<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/yellowwallpaper/>

If the text is difficult to grasp for some students, this is a valuable resource for students to help clarify plot points, key themes, character motives, etc.

Vocabulary

G10 Challenging Vocabulary:

stimulus (10) convolutions (10) felicity (9) impertinence (9) conspicuous (9) interminable (9) congenial (8) galore (8) atrocious (8) querulous (8) debase (8) flamboyant (8)

G8 Challenging Vocabulary:

abhors (8), atrocious (8), attests (8), caprice (8), congenial (8), debase (8), flamboyant (8), furtive (8), galore (8), genial (8), impetus (8), inane (8), incessant (8), indulge (8), inert (8), insolence (8), petulant (8), querulous (8), accustomed (7), agitate (7), conscientiously (7), cycles (7), delirium (7), detest (7), hypothesis (7), illustrious (7), jeer (7), prescription (7), reputation (7), veranda (7), alternation (6), balmiest (6), betrayed (6), blessed (6), bloated (6), commands (6), contempt (6), contradictions (6), counsel (6), covered (6), defiance (6), dwells (6), expeditions (6), fascinating (6), fate (6), fatigue (6), head (6), indeed (6), ingenious (6), secluded (6), stimulate/stimulating (6), temperament (6)

G6 Challenging Vocabulary:

abhors (8), atrocious (8), attests (8), caprice (8), congenial (8), debase (8), flamboyant (8), furtive (8), galore (8), genial (8), impetus (8), inane (8), incessant (8), indulge (8), inert (8), insolence (8), petulant (8), querulous (8), accustomed (7), agitate (7), conscientiously (7), cycles (7), delirium (7), detest (7), hypothesis (7), illustrious (7), jeer (7), prescription (7), reputation (7), veranda (7), alternation (6), balmiest (6), betrayed (6), blessed (6), bloated (6), commands (6), contempt (6), contradictions (6), counsel (6), covered (6), defiance (6), dwells (6), expeditions (6), fascinating (6), fate (6), fatigue (6), head (6), indeed (6), ingenious (6), secluded (6), stimulate/stimulating (6), temperament (6)

G4 Challenging Vocabulary:

absurd (4), affected (4), analyze (4), angles (4), bordered (4), chaos (4), complex (4), confess (4), depends on (4), developments (4), dreadfully (4), flaws (4), isolated (4), mastered (4), misinterpreted (4), mocks (4), nooks (4), oversees (4), pattern/patterns (4), profession (4), professional (4), tendencies (4), wonder (4), appetite (3), astonish (3), bare (3), bars (3), carriage (3), cautioned (3), edge/edges (3), encourages (3), exercise (3), foolish (3), forbidden (3), foul (3), frightened (3), horrendous (3), horrid (3), humiliating (3), irritate/irritates (3), must (3), obtain (3), realize (3), redecorate (3), relieved (3), sags (3), satisfies (3), supervision (3), suspect (3), upsets (3), value (3), velvet (3), yards (3), absolutely (2), bay (2), comfortable (2), convinced (2), declared (2), duties (2), entertain/entertaining/entertainment (2), excitement (2), expects (2), fabric (2), faith (2), fantasy (2), fierce (2), furniture (2), gymnastics (2), habit (2), insanity (2), kind (2), legal (2), manages (2), obvious (2), permanence (2), private (2), recover/recovering (2), repairs (2), respected (2), scratched (2), serious (2), servants (2), shaded (2), splintered (2), stain/stained/stained (2), strength (2), strip (2), stripped (2), suffer (2), tolerate (2), trust (2), vicious (2), wise (2)

G2 Challenging Vocabulary:

absolutely (2), bay (2), comfortable (2), convinced (2), design (2), entertain/entertained (2), excitement (2), expect (2), faith (2), fantasy (2), fierce (2), furniture (2), gymnastics (2), habit (2), kind (2), legal (2), manages (2), obvious (2), private (2), recover/recovering (2), repairs (2), respected (2), scratched (2), serious (2), servants (2), shaded (2), splintered (2), stain/stained/stains (2), strength (2), stripped (2), suffer (2), tolerate (2), trust (2), vicious (2), wise (2), admit (1), afraid (1), annoy/annoyed/annoying/annoys (1), awful/awfully (1), beg (1), breeze (1), bushes (1), corner (1), dress (1), dock (1), empty (1), evening (1), hate/hated/hates (1), husband (1), idea (1), leaf (1), medicine/medicines (1), odd (1), paint (1), path/paths (1), people (1), perfect (1), perhaps (1), place/places (1), porch (1), questions (1), rest (1), roses (1), shined/shines (1), strange/strangest (1), trip (1), wink (1), write/writing (1), air (0), alone (0), angry (0), awake (0), baby (0), bed/beds (0), brother (0), chair (0), child/children (0), color (0), count (0), doctor (0), door (0), flowers (0), friend/friends (0), garden (0), glad (0), happy (0), house/houses (0), laugh/laughed/laughs (0), light (0), line/lines (0), lucky (0), man (0), mother (0), paper (0), shoulder (0), sick (0), silly (0), smell/smelled/smells (0), summer (0), ugly (0), wall/walls (0), week/weeks (0), wish/wished (0), woman (0)