

Discussion questions

“Story of an Hour” (1894), Kate Chopin

1. What did you think the “thing” “approaching to possess” Mrs. Mallard was on page 67? Why? Rereading the first page, how does Mrs. Mallard’s secret “monstrous joy” change the way you understand the actions of Josephine and Mrs. Mallard?
2. In this brief story, the sky or air is mentioned four times—twice on page 66, twice on page 67. Likewise, weather metaphors saturate the text. What are all of these allusions doing there? How do they shape the story?
3. 1894, the year “Story of an Hour” was published, U.S. “coverture” laws were beginning to fade away—laws that dictated that women were not allowed to exist as legal entities separate from their husbands. Yet progress was gradual; indeed, women still weren’t able to take out loans or secure credit cards without their husbands’ signatures until the 1970s. Given this context, what kind of argument can we speculate Kate Chopin might have been making with “Story of an Hour”?
4. What do we know about the characters in “Story of an Hour”? What do we not know that we might like to know? Why might an author relinquish control over her characters this way?