

Rutherford County Schools – Individual Learning Modules

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| Grade | Course |
| High School | English III |
| Unit Focus | |
| Students read and analyze chapters I–II of <i>The Awakening</i> , in which the characters of Mr. Pontellier, Mrs. Pontellier, and Robert are introduced. Students focus on the impact of Chopin’s choice to introduce Mr. Pontellier before his wife in the text. Additionally, students consider the relationships between Mr. and Mrs. Pontellier, and Mrs. Pontellier and Robert. | |
| Week of 4/13 – 4/17 | |
| Standard(s) | |
| RL.3 - Analyze how an author’s choices regarding the development and interaction of characters, events, and ideas over the course of a text impact meaning. | L.4 - Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on 11th-12th grade-level text by choosing flexibly from a range of strategies. |
| Resource(s) | |
| CommonLit Activity ACT Academy | Explanatory Essay Rubric |
| Task(s) | |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does the narrator introduce the character of Mr. Pontellier in this opening excerpt? 2. How does the narrator introduce the setting of the excerpt? 3. How does the narrator first introduce the character of Edna Pontellier? 4. What language does Mr. Pontellier use to describe Edna? What does this language suggest about their relationship? 5. How can the meaning of <i>frankly</i> in chapter I help define the word <i>frankness</i> in chapter II? <p>Write a multi-paragraph essay in response to the following prompt: How does introducing Edna Pontellier through the perspective of Mr. Pontellier develop Edna’s character?</p> | |
| Expected Outcomes | |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The narrator introduces Mr. Pontellier as a person that seems easily annoyed; he is “unable to read his newspaper” because of two birds and leaves them with “an expression and an exclamation of disgust” (Par. 4). The narrator describes him as tidy: “his hair was brown and straight” and “his beard was neatly and closely trimmed” (Par. 7). He reads his paper “restlessly” and seems to be distracted by the actions going on around him (Par. 6). 2. The narrator uses Mr. Pontellier’s perspective to describe the setting, which is a group of cottages in the summertime. The narrator describes the setting as noisy, with many activities happening at once. Mr. Pontellier hears “chattering and whistling birds,” “two young girls ... playing a duet,” and Madame Lebrun “giving orders in a high key” (Par. 8). Also, Mr. Pontellier sees his “two children” playing (Par. 8). 3. The narrator uses Mr. Pontellier’s perspective to first introduce Edna. Mr. Pontellier watches as Edna approaches their cottage but does not really describe her in any significant way. The description shows only Mr. Pontellier “fixing his gaze upon a white sunshade,” which he knows belongs to his wife (Par. 9). 4. Mr. Pontellier calls Edna’s swimming “folly,” because she allows herself to get “burnt” (Par. 10-11). Mr. Pontellier sees Edna as a possession and looks at her like “a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage” (Par. 11). This language suggests a relationship in which a husband feels ownership over his wife. 5. In chapter I, <i>frankly</i> means to say exactly what you mean, since Robert “admitted quite frankly” that he wanted to spend time with Edna rather than accept Mr. Pontellier’s invitation (Par. 13). In chapter II, <i>frankness</i> is used to describe the “captivating” look of Edna’s face and “expression,” so <i>frankness</i> must mean to have your face show exactly what you are thinking (Par. 19). | |

Excerpt from *The Awakening* – Kate Chopin

I

[1] A green and yellow parrot, which hung in a cage outside the door, kept repeating over and over:

“Allez vous-en! Allez vous-en! Sapristi! That's all right!”

He could speak a little Spanish, and also a language which nobody understood, unless it was the mocking-bird that hung on the other side of the door, whistling his fluty notes out upon the breeze with maddening persistence.

Mr. Pontellier, unable to read his newspaper with any degree of comfort, arose with an expression and an exclamation of disgust.

[5] He walked down the gallery and across the narrow “bridges” which connected the Lebrun cottages one with the other. He had been seated before the door of the main house. The parrot and the mockingbird were the property of Madame Lebrun, and they had the right to make all the noise they wished. Mr. Pontellier had the privilege of quitting their society when they ceased to be entertaining.

He stopped before the door of his own cottage, which was the fourth one from the main building and next to the last. Seating himself in a wicker rocker which was there, he once more applied himself to the task of reading the newspaper. The day was Sunday; the paper was a day old. The Sunday papers had not yet reached Grand Isle. He was already acquainted with the market reports, and he glanced restlessly over the editorials and bits of news which he had not had time to read before quitting New Orleans the day before.

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.

Once in a while he withdrew his glance from the newspaper and looked about him. There was more noise than ever over at the house. The main building was called “the house,” to distinguish it from the cottages. The chattering and whistling birds were still at it. Two young girls, the Farival twins, were playing a duet from “Zampa” upon the piano. Madame Lebrun was bustling in and out, giving orders in a high key to a yard-boy whenever she got inside the house, and directions in an equally high voice to a dining-room servant whenever she got outside. She was a fresh, pretty woman, clad always in white with elbow sleeves. Her starched skirts crinkled as she came and went. Farther down, before one of the cottages, a lady in black was walking demurely up and down, telling her beads. A good many persons of the pension had gone over to the Cheniere Caminada in Beaudelet's lugger to hear mass. Some young people were out under the wateroaks playing croquet. Mr. Pontellier's two children were there—sturdy little fellows of four and five. A quadron nurse followed them about with a faraway, meditative air.

Mr. Pontellier finally lit a cigar and began to smoke, letting the paper drag idly from his hand. He fixed his gaze upon a white sunshade that was advancing at snail's pace from the beach. He could see it plainly between the gaunt trunks of the water-oaks and across the stretch of yellow camomile. The gulf looked far away, melting hazily into the blue of the horizon. The sunshade continued to approach slowly. Beneath its pink-lined shelter were his wife, Mrs. Pontellier, and young Robert Lebrun. When they reached the cottage, the two seated themselves with some appearance of fatigue upon the upper step of the porch, facing each other, each leaning against a supporting post.

[10] “What folly! to bathe at such an hour in such heat!” exclaimed Mr. Pontellier. He himself had taken a plunge at daylight. That was why the morning seemed long to him.

“You are burnt beyond recognition,” he added, looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage. She held up her hands, strong, shapely hands, and surveyed them critically, drawing up her fawn sleeves above the wrists. Looking at them reminded her of her rings, which she had given to her husband before leaving for the beach. She silently reached out to him, and he, understanding, took the rings from his vest pocket and dropped them into her open palm. She slipped them upon her fingers; then clasping her knees, she looked across at Robert and began to laugh. The rings sparkled upon her fingers. He sent back an answering smile.

“What is it?” asked Pontellier, looking lazily and amused from one to the other. It was some utter nonsense; some adventure out there in the water, and they both tried to relate it at once. It did not seem half so amusing when told. They realized this, and so did Mr. Pontellier. He yawned and stretched himself. Then he got up, saying he had half a mind to go over to Klein's hotel and play a game of billiards.

“Come go along, Lebrun,” he proposed to Robert. But Robert admitted quite frankly that he preferred to stay where he was and talk to Mrs. Pontellier.

“Well, send him about his business when he bores you, Edna,” instructed her husband as he prepared to leave.

[15] “Here, take the umbrella,” she exclaimed, holding it out to him. He accepted the sunshade, and lifting it over his head descended the steps and walked away.

“Coming back to dinner?” his wife called after him. He halted a moment and shrugged his shoulders. He felt in his vest pocket; there was a ten-dollar bill there. He did not know; perhaps he would return for the early dinner and perhaps he would not. It all depended upon the company which he found over at Klein's and the size of “the game.” He did not say this, but she understood it, and laughed, nodding good-by to him.

Both children wanted to follow their father when they saw him starting out. He kissed them and promised to bring them back bonbons and peanuts.

II

Mrs. Pontellier's eyes were quick and bright; they were a yellowish brown, about the color of her hair. She had a way of turning them swiftly upon an object and holding them there as if lost in some inward maze of contemplation or thought.

Her eyebrows were a shade darker than her hair. They were thick and almost horizontal, emphasizing the depth of her eyes. She was rather handsome than beautiful. Her face was captivating by reason of a certain frankness of expression and a contradictory subtle play of features. Her manner was engaging.

[20] Robert rolled a cigarette. He smoked cigarettes because he could not afford cigars, he said. He had a cigar in his pocket which Mr. Pontellier had presented him with, and he was saving it for his after-dinner smoke.

This seemed quite proper and natural on his part. In coloring he was not unlike his companion. A clean-shaved face made the resemblance more pronounced than it would otherwise have been. There rested no shadow of care upon his open countenance. His eyes gathered in and reflected the light and languor of the summer day.

Mrs. Pontellier reached over for a palm-leaf fan that lay on the porch and began to fan herself, while Robert sent between his lips light puffs from his cigarette. They chatted incessantly: about the things around them; their amusing adventure out in the water—it had again assumed its entertaining aspect; about the wind, the trees, the people who had gone to the Cheniere; about the children playing croquet under the oaks, and the Farival twins, who were now performing the overture to “The Poet and the Peasant.”

Robert talked a good deal about himself. He was very young, and did not know any better. Mrs. Pontellier talked a little about herself for the same reason. Each was interested in what the other said. Robert spoke of his intention to go to Mexico in the autumn, where fortune awaited him. He was always intending to go to Mexico, but some way never got there. Meanwhile he held on to his modest position in a mercantile house in New Orleans, where an equal familiarity with English, French and Spanish gave him no small value as a clerk and correspondent.

He was spending his summer vacation, as he always did, with his mother at Grand Isle. In former times, before Robert could remember, “the house” had been a summer luxury of the Lebruns. Now, flanked by its dozen or more cottages, which were always filled with exclusive visitors from the “Quartier Francais,” it enabled Madame Lebrun to maintain the easy and comfortable existence which appeared to be her birthright.

[25] Mrs. Pontellier talked about her father's Mississippi plantation and her girlhood home in the old Kentucky bluegrass country. She was an American woman, with a small infusion of French which seemed to have been lost in dilution. She read a letter from her sister, who was away in the East, and who had engaged herself to be married. Robert was interested, and wanted to know what manner of girls the sisters were, what the father was like, and how long the mother had been dead.

When Mrs. Pontellier folded the letter it was time for her to dress for the early dinner.

"I see Leonce isn't coming back," she said, with a glance in the direction whence her husband had disappeared. Robert supposed he was not, as there were a good many New Orleans club men over at Klein's.

When Mrs. Pontellier left him to enter her room, the young man descended the steps and strolled over toward the croquet players, where, during the half-hour before dinner, he amused himself with the little Pontellier children, who were very fond of him.