

**Effective Use of Lesson Time through Literature Circles
in the Literature in English Classroom
A Teaching Plan**

Introduction:

- Literature in English teachers sometimes may find it difficult to cover the literary texts in great detail and depth within the limited lesson time. To fully utilise the lesson time to maximise learning and teaching effectiveness, literature circles, an instruction to actively involve learners' participation, could be considered.

- Literature circles can be adopted in the Literature in English classroom to:
 - extend learner learning outside class time
 - enhance the quality of discussion and interaction, as well as the efficiency of instruction during lesson time
 - encourage learners' close reading and independent exploration of the texts
 - cater for learner diversity in terms of level of abilities and learning styles
 - enhance learners' study skills and capacity for self-directed learning
 - promote peer learning and engage learners in critical thinking

The General Principles of Literature Circles:

- **Literature circles** are widely used to promote reading and peer collaboration. It is a learner-centred instruction that requires learners' active involvement both inside and outside class time. It functions like a book club but with more defined roles and structure in order to facilitate a fruitful exchange of ideas on the reading texts.
- According to DaLie (2001), the true intent of literature circles is "to allow students to practise and develop the skills and strategies of good readers".
- Below are the usual procedure of a literature circle:
 1. The teacher assigns / the learners choose a text (e.g. a short story, a poem, a novel or a chapter of it, a film).
 2. Small groups are formed to focus on a common reading text.
 3. Based on their interest and abilities, each group member is assigned a different role focussing on one aspect of the literary text.
 4. Discussion prompts and guiding questions are provided to guide learners' reading and stimulate their responses.*
 5. Learners read the text with their roles in mind and use written notes or

drawings to record their thoughts in preparation for the discussion.

6. The group meets up for sharing and discussion in a scheduled time. While learners take turns to present ideas based on their roles and elicit feedback and responses from other group members, the teacher serves as a facilitator, observer, and listener and provides timely assistance.
7. Learners can form new groups and switch roles in the next reading cycle based on their new reading texts.

*Note: The roles and the prompts or guiding questions for each role may only be a temporary scaffold to help learners stay on-task, and generate and organise ideas. When learners understand the level of discourse and response expected of them, they can let go of the role sheet. As Daniels (1994) puts it, “the role sheets are abandoned as soon as groups are capable of lively, text-centred, multifaceted discussions.”

Roles in a Literature Circle

The roles assigned for each literature circle can be very flexible and creative depending on the learners’ needs, the learning objectives and the purpose of reading. The following are some common roles assigned to cater to learners’ different learning styles and abilities:

Role	Duties/tasks
Discussion Facilitator	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing a list of questions to prompt the discussion for the meeting• Keeping the group on-task
Illustrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drawing, sketching, or painting a picture relating to the reading text• Sharing the artwork and explaining it in relation to the texts
Connector	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Locating several significant parts of the text and connecting them to real life• Connecting the themes, incidents or characters in the text to other literary texts
Summariser	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preparing a brief summary and overview of the reading text assigned for the meeting• Identifying main ideas, themes, events, characters, symbols and other significant highlights of the text

Word Wizard/Smith/ Master/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying important words or words that are new, unfamiliar, unusual or stand out in some way in the reading text Providing the definition of the words or explaining why the words are used in the text
Investigator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researching into topics related to the text (e.g. socio-historical background, the cultural contexts)
Literary Luminary / Line Lighter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying a few lines or sections of the text that are important or well-written Reading the selected lines or sections aloud and explaining why they are powerful or important

Apart from learning styles and abilities, teachers could also determine what roles should be assigned depending on the features of the literary genres (e.g. poems, short stories, films) and the reading texts chosen. The following teaching plan on “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkin Gilman, which has been tried out in a Secondary 5 class, illustrates:

- how a literature circle could be formed based on the different aspects of a short story; and
- how students could be engaged in learning both within and outside the classroom to maximise learning effectiveness and teaching efficiency.

**Sample Teaching Plan –
Teaching Charlotte Perkin Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper”
through Literature Circles**

Background Information:

Level of students:	S5
Duration:	2 double lessons of 40 minutes
Text to be studied:	Charlotte Perkin Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper”
Lesson objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand the theme, plot, setting, characterisation, writing style and techniques of the story • To develop personal responses and expand the text imaginatively
Students’ prior knowledge:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation and group discussion skills • Exposure to some short stories • Understanding of the key features of a short story and aspects of short story analysis (see Appendix 1)

Implementation of the Literature Circle

Suggested time	Learning and Teaching Process	Remarks
<i>Pre-lesson 1 Preparation</i>		
2 weeks before	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The teacher decides on a short story to focus on with learners. ➤ The teacher divides learners into groups of six and gives out a full set of role sheets to each group (See Appendix 2). ➤ The teacher asks learners to discuss and decide on the role each group member will take up. ➤ The teacher asks learners to start reading the short story and note down some ideas in response to the questions on their role sheets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Allowing learners’ choices can promote learner autonomy and address learner diversity. For example, learners who like drawing can take up the role of “Setting Illustrator”.
1 week before	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The teacher monitors learners’ progress by collecting their role sheets to check how well learners can grasp the key ideas of the story. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The teacher can provide more support such as adapting the task requirements and providing research tips upon reviewing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The teacher reminds learners to focus primarily on the role they take up and enrich their answers as much as possible before the meeting. ➤ The teacher explains to learners their duties: to present their ideas and findings on the questions on their role sheet, and lead the other group members to discuss the last question which is more evaluative and open-ended than the others. 	<p>learners' progress.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The teacher should provide timely support to ensure learners' sufficient preparation and the effective operation of the literature circle.
<i>Lesson 1 (Double Period)</i>		
15 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The teacher explains the procedure of the literature circle (i.e. Each student will spend 5 mins on the presentation of answers to the first few questions and another 5 mins leading the group to discuss the last question). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ After presenting the answers to the first few questions as input, the learner can be asked to lead the group to discuss the evaluative and open-ended question at the end of the role sheet he/she is in charge of. This is designed to stimulate group interaction and exchange of ideas among learners. ➤ The teacher may demonstrate the level of analysis and the presentation language expected in the individual presentation and group discussion through modelling if necessary.
65 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The teacher asks the class to start the first round with the role of "Biographer". ➤ The teacher sets the timer at the interval of 5 mins. He/she reminds the learners to start discussing the last question after 5 mins and remind them to take notes while their group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The teacher may encourage learners to ask questions to seek clarifications or offer alternative views when their groupmates are presenting. ➤ Learners are encouraged to take notes while listening to their groupmates' presentation on other roles.

	<p>members are presenting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The teacher asks the class to move on to the second role “Summariser” after 10 mins and repeat the same steps with the other four roles (i.e. Character Investigator, Plot Analyst, Setting Illustrator, and Literary Luminary), allowing a 1-min break between speakers. ➤ The teacher circulates to check students’ progress and offer support where necessary throughout the whole process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Through attentive listening and participation in discussion, learners can gain a deeper and fuller understanding of the story. Learners will also be more ready to examine the different aspects of the story because of their preparation and contribution.
<i>Pre-lesson 2 Preparation</i>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The teacher asks learners to tidy up and enrich their role sheets after listening to their peers’ input in the discussion. ➤ The teacher asks each group to submit a full set of revised role sheets. ➤ The teacher asks learners to complete the Hot Seating worksheet (Appendix 3) individually and submit the work before Lesson 2. ➤ The teacher studies learners’ role sheets to check if there are any points to supplement and misconceptions to clarify. ➤ The teacher photocopies sample role sheets for display in class to facilitate feedback. ➤ The teacher reads learners’ messages and questions for the narrator and prepares to respond to them in the role of the narrator in the second lesson. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To fully utilise the lesson time for quality interaction and deep exploration of the story, the teacher collects the learners’ messages and questions for the narrator to review and study before the lesson. This enables the teacher to prepare appropriate responses for the hot-seating activity and provide timely feedback.

Lesson 2 (Double Period)		
40 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The teacher provides feedback on the output of learners' discussion with reference to the role sheets collected. ➤ The teacher displays some insightful analysis or flawed ideas and encourages learners to comment on the validity of the ideas presented, which extends learners' thinking and guides them to further develop the ideas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Assessment for learning and peer learning is promoted in the process. The teacher and peer feedback and suggestions for improvement help learners to reflect on their own understanding of the story and refine the answers on the role sheets.
30 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The teacher plays the role of the narrator in the story. Learners take turns to express a message for the narrator and ask the narrator questions. The teacher responds to the messages and answers the questions in the role of the narrator. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The hot-seating activity is designed to deepen students' learning experience and encourage their imaginative expansion and personal response to the story. It also offers some room for the teacher to present an alternative view to the story to help learners analyse and appreciate the story from a different perspective.
10 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The teacher asks learners to reflect on the experience of the literature circle and share their views on this mode of learning and exploring the text. 	

Some of the activities have been tried out in United Christian College (Kowloon East). We thank the school for sharing their experience.

References

- DaLie, S.O. (2001). Students becoming real readers: Literature circles in high school English classes, in Ericson, B.O. (Ed.), *Teaching Reading in High School English Classes*. Urbana: NCTE, 84-100.
- Daniels, H. (1994). *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom*. Markham: Pembroke Publishers Ltd.

Aspects to Consider in the Appreciation of a Short Story

Discuss the questions below, providing QUOTES OR PARAPHRASED EVIDENCE from the story to support your arguments.

SETTING:

- How important is the setting of the story? How does it contribute to the overall meaning/message?
- Would the story be very different if it was set in another place and time? Why?

TONE/MOOD:

- What is the tone/mood of the story?
- How does the author convey that tone/mood?

CHARACTERS:

- What inferences can we draw about the characters, based on their actions, speeches and descriptions about them?
- What major challenges do the characters face, and how do they deal with them?
- What major decisions do the characters make, and why? What do these decisions reveal about the characters?
- Can you relate to any of the characters? If yes, who? How can you identify with the character(s)?

SYMBOLS/MOTIFS:

- What motifs/symbols recur in the text, and how do they add to the understanding of character, setting, or theme?
- What is the significance of the title, and how does it add to the understanding of the text?

STYLE/WRITER'S DECISIONS:

- How are sensory details used in this story, and to what effect?
- What passages in the story drew your attention the most, and why?
- What specifically did you like or dislike about this story, and why?
- Does this story remind you of anything else you have read?
- If you were the author, what would you have done differently?

POINT OF VIEW:

- From whose point of view (POV) do we see the story?
- Why do you think the author chose this POV instead of a different one?
- Compared to other aspects of the story, how important is POV in this story?
- How would the story change if we saw it from a different character's perspective? Pick a different character and explain how the story would change.

LESSONS/MESSAGES:

- What lessons do the characters learn?
- What lessons do we learn?

Notesheet for Discussion on a Short Story

STORY TITLE: _____ **AUTHOR:** _____

SETTING:

TONE/MOOD:

CHARACTERS:

SYMBOLS/MOTIFS:

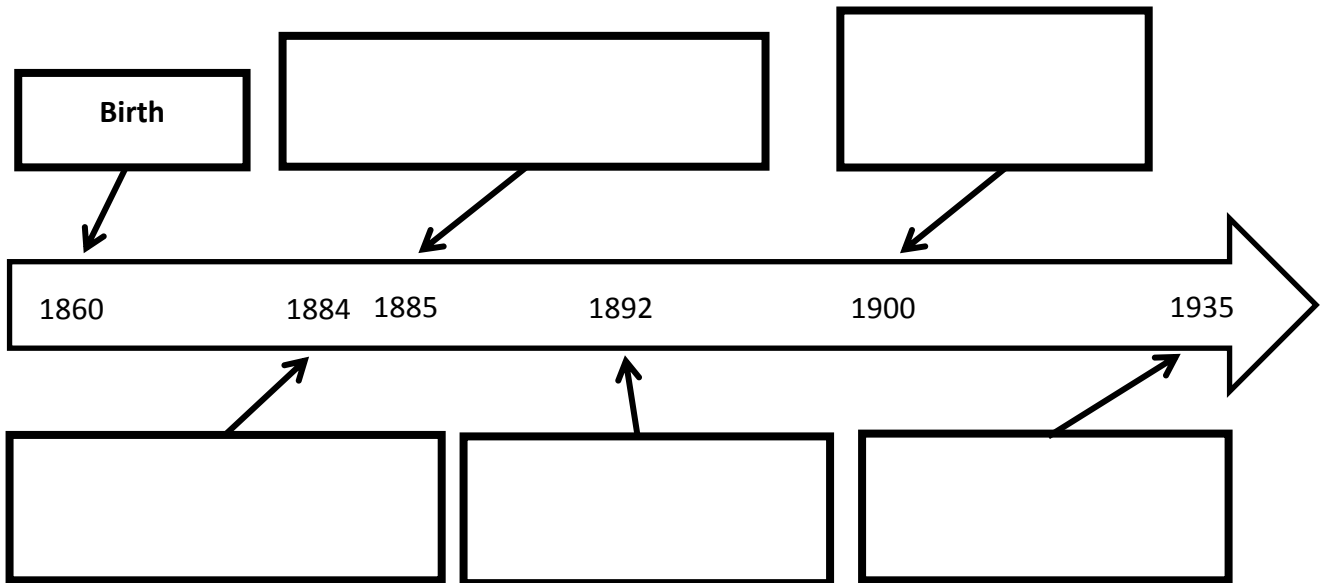
STYLE/WRITER'S DECISIONS:

POINT OF VIEW:

LESSONS/MESSAGES:

THE YELLOW WALLPAPER – Charlotte Perkins Gilman
Biographer

Mark the milestones at different stages of C.P. Gilman’s life in the following timeline.



Study the following publications of and quotations by C.P Gilman:

Year	Publications
1892	<i>The Yellow Wallpaper</i>
1898	<i>Women and Economics</i>
1900	<i>Concerning Children</i>
1903	<i>The Home: Its Work and Influence</i>
1904	<i>Human Work</i>
1915	<i>Does a Man Support His Wife?</i>
1915	<i>Herland</i>
1915	<i>The Dress of Women</i>

- "There is no female mind. The brain is not an organ of sex. Might as well speak of a female liver."
- "It is not that women are really smaller-minded, weaker-minded, more timid and vacillating, but that whosoever, man or woman, lives always in a small, dark place, is always guarded, protected, directed and restrained, will become inevitably narrowed and weakened by it."
- "A house does not need a wife any more than it needs a husband."
- "Here she comes, running out of prison and off the pedestal; chains off, crown off, halo off, just a live woman."

What do you think is her advocacy?

What do you think about the social status of women at the time when C.P. Gilman wrote the short story "The Yellow Wallpaper"? Give reasons to support your answer.

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is often considered autobiographical. In what ways does the short story resemble C. P. Gilman's own life?

THE YELLOW WALLPAPER – Charlotte Perkins Gilman
Summariser

Summarise the short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” in 80 words.

Identify the themes of the short story and explain each of them with relevant events / quotations from the story. Some examples have been done for you.

Themes	Events / quotations (page reference)
Suppression of thoughts / self-expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“He says that with my imaginative power and habit of storymaking, a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency.”</i> (p.82) • <i>“I verily believe she thinks it is the writing which made me sick!”</i> (p.83) • •
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“If a physician of high standing, and one’s own husband...what is one to do?”</i> (p.79) • John does not even allow his wife, the narrator, to choose a room that she likes downstairs. (p.80) • •
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • •

Do you think the themes in “The Yellow Wallpaper” are too dark? Why?

Can you get any positive messages from reading “The Yellow Wallpaper”? Explain.

THE YELLOW WALLPAPER – Charlotte Perkins Gilman
Character Investigator

Fill in the blanks with the details of the characters in the short story “The Yellow Wallpaper”.

Name		Narrator / “I”	
Role			Housekeeper
3 adjectives to describe him/her with textual support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authoritative – He does not allow his wife to write, thinking that this will do harm to her health. 	•	•
	•	•	•
	•	•	•

Study the following sentences extracted from different parts of the story.

- Part 1 I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes.
 He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction.
- Part 2 John does not know how much I really suffer.
- Part 3 I cry at nothing, and cry most of the time. Of course I don’t when John is here, or anybody else, but when I am alone.
- Part 4 Dear John! He loves me very dearly, and hates to have me sick.
 The fact is I am getting a little afraid of John.
- Part 5 And John is so queer now that I don’t want to irritate him. I wish he would take another room.
 He asked me all sorts of questions too, and pretended to be very loving and kind.
- Part 6 I don’t want to go out, and I don’t want to have anybody come in, till John comes. I want to astonish him.

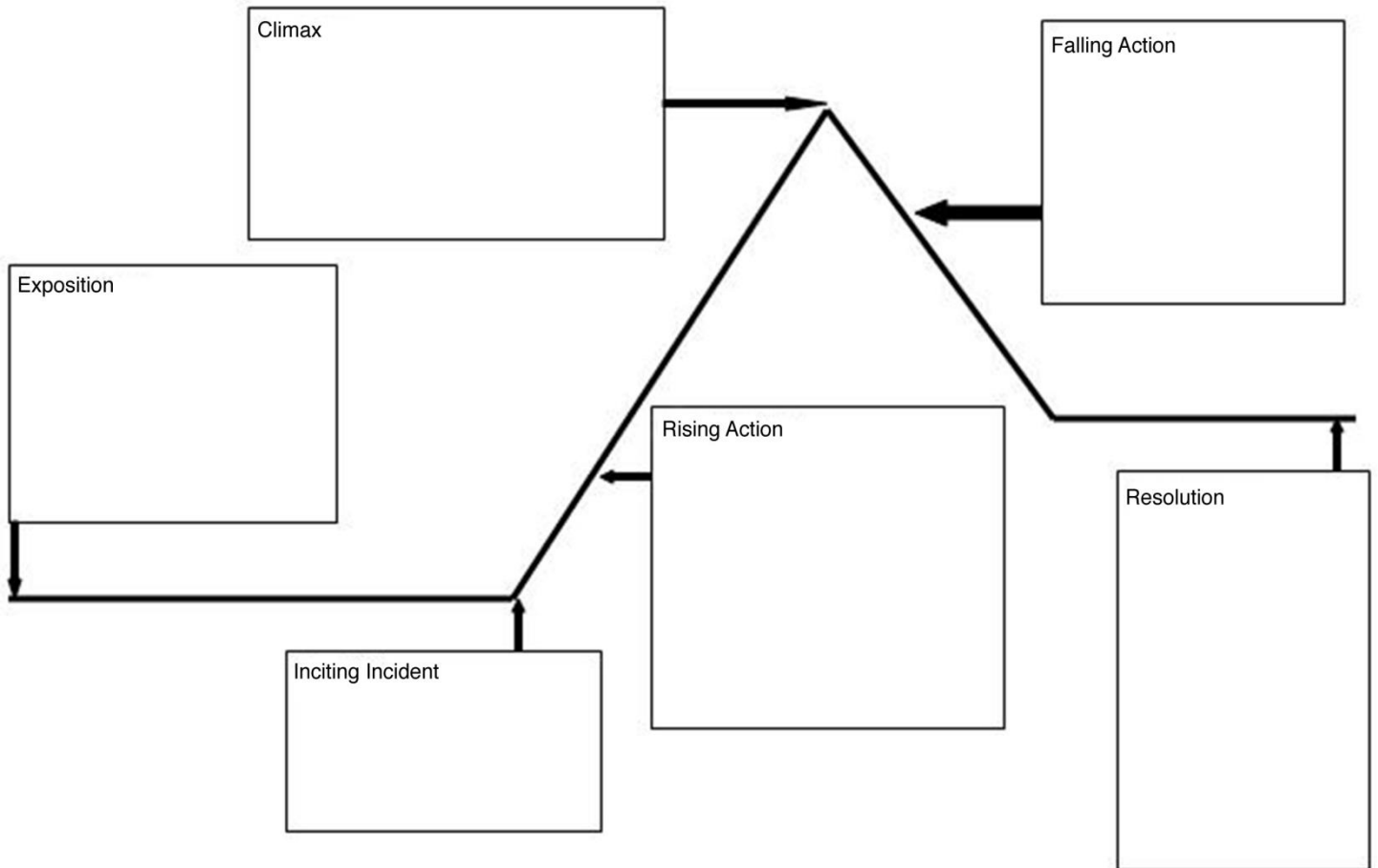
From the above sentences, describe the relationship between the narrator and her husband. Does their relationship change with the narrator's mental state?

Do you sympathise with the narrator? Why or why not?

THE YELLOW WALLPAPER – Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Plot Analyst

Complete the plot diagram below with relevant details from “The Yellow Wallpaper”. You may adapt the diagram or design another one if you find this classical plot structure not applicable to the story.



Can you identify the following conflicts from “The Yellow Wallpaper”? Explain the conflicts and whether they are resolved in the end with relevant details from the story.

Type of conflict	Explanations and details	Is the conflict resolved? How? (if YES) / Why? (if NO)
Conflict between characters		

Conflict between the character and the environment		
Conflict within oneself (inner struggle)		

How is the narrator's eventual nervous breakdown foreshadowed?

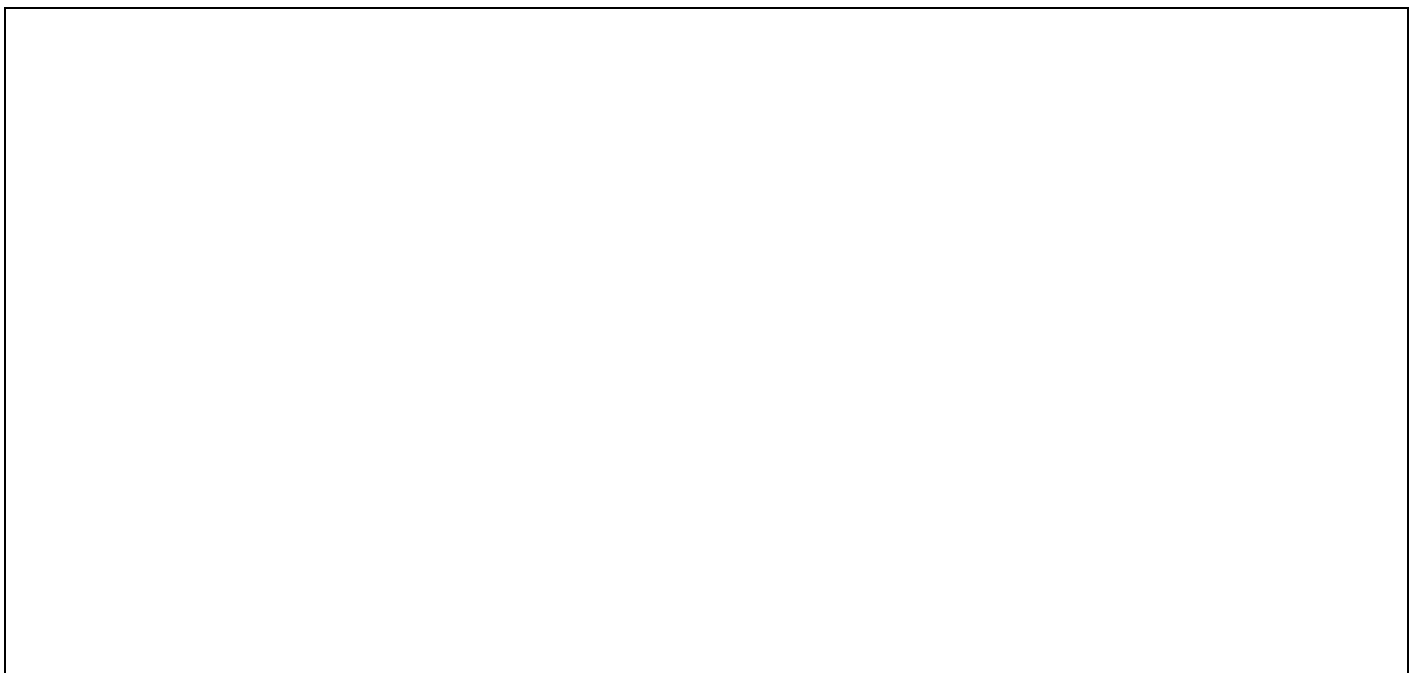
Does "The Yellow Wallpaper" end the way you expect? What do you think will happen to the main characters?

THE YELLOW WALLPAPER – Charlotte Perkins Gilman
Setting Illustrator

Read the first two entries / parts of the story. Write down the adjectives and expressions that the narrator uses to describe the place she is in:

	Descriptive words / expressions
The house	
The room	
<i>Inside the Room</i>	
Windows	
Furniture	
Floor	
Wall paper (e.g. colours, patterns)	
Views out of the window	

Draw a picture of the room the narrator is in based on the descriptions provided.



What mood, atmosphere and feelings does the setting create? What inferences can you make about the narrator's social and psychological status from her description of the setting?

Do you think the set place and time help to convey the themes of the story? How/Why?

THE YELLOW WALLPAPER – Charlotte Perkins Gilman
Literary Luminary (Styles and Techniques)

Symbolism

What is the significance of the yellow wallpaper in the story?

(a) How is the wallpaper representative of the domestic sphere?	
(b) What are the psychological implications of the colour "unclean yellow" and the "formless pattern"?	
(c) How do the descriptions of the wall paper change with the narrator's mental health and her relationship with her husband?	
(d) What does the tearing off of the wallpaper suggest?	

Narrative Voice

The story is narrated from the first-person perspective. Do you find the narrator's first person account of the events reliable and easy to follow? Why?

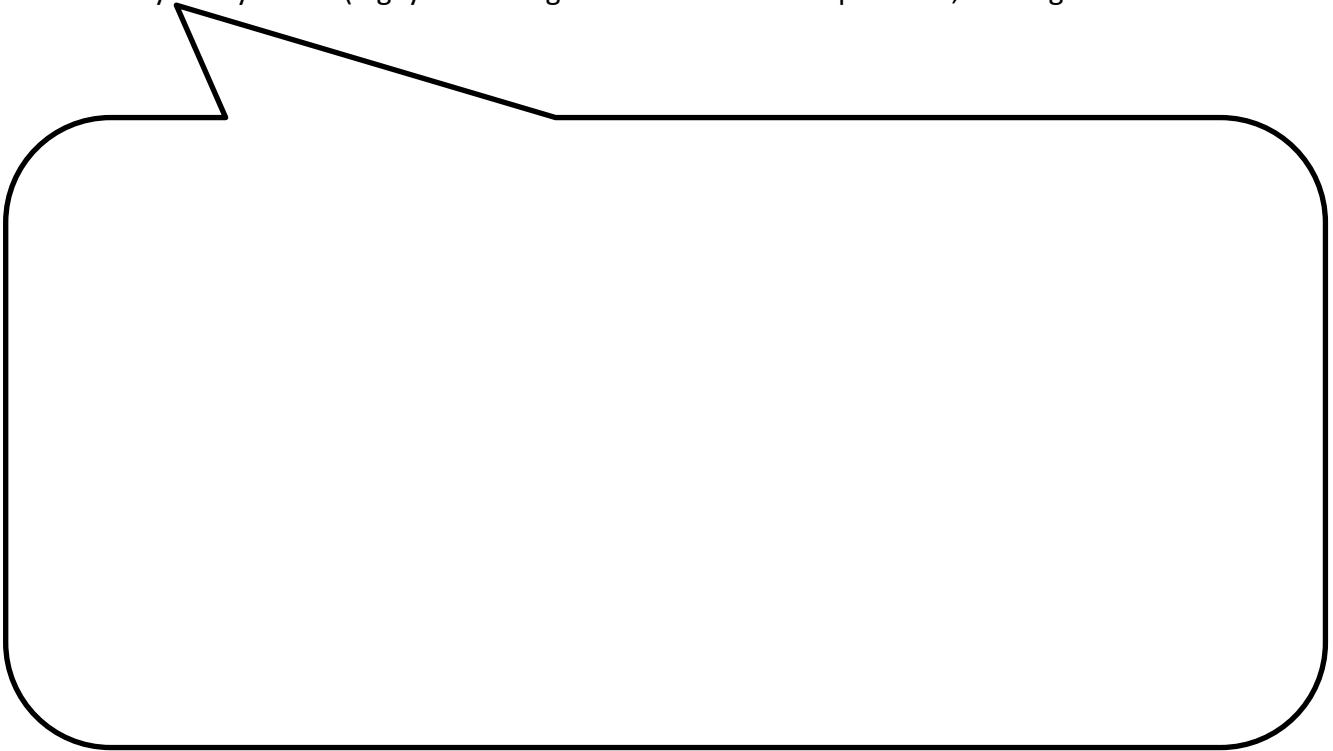
Could you think of some adjectives to describe the tone of the narrator? Please explain each answer with relevant quotations from the text.

<u>Adjectives</u>	<u>Textual Support</u>
Ironic / sarcastic	"John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage."

Meeting the Narrator

Imagine a time machine could take you back to the 1890s and you could interview the narrator one month after the ending of the story.

What would you say to her (e.g. your feelings and views on her experience, messages and advice for her)?



Think of one question you would really like to ask her after reading her story.

