

What Do Women Want?

Directions: Many have asked the questions, but no unanimous answer has yet been given. Answer the following to express your opinions.

- _____ 1. What do women want?
- money
 - fame or success
 - rich husbands
 - power over their husbands
 - tranquility
 - independence
- _____ 2. What is a woman's place?
- in the home
 - in the kitchen
 - in an office
 - in the Senate
 - in a classroom
 - in a boardroom
- _____ 3. What should a woman with young children do?
- stay home and rear them
 - work part-time
 - use a child-care center
 - share parenting responsibility with husband
 - develop hobbies
- _____ 4. How should a man treat a woman?
- as an equal
 - as a possession
 - as a child
 - as a pet
 - as a housekeeper
 - as a slave
- _____ 5. Where should a woman get her ideas?
- from books
 - from her father
 - from her husband
 - from her education
 - from television

What Men Say about Women

Directions: Be prepared to react to the following statements.

1. A man likes his wife to be just clever enough to comprehend his cleverness, and just stupid enough to admire.—Israel Zangwill
2. Nature has given woman so much power that the law cannot afford to give her more.—Samuel Johnson
3. No trust is to be placed in women.—Homer
4. In childhood a woman must be subject to her father; in youth to her husband; when her husband is dead, to her sons. A woman must never be free of subjugation.—*The Code of Manu*
5. Whoever trusts women plows the winds, sows the deserts of the sea, and writes his memoirs in the snow.—Paul Flemming
6. A very little wit is valued in a woman, as we are pleased with a few words spoken plain by a parrot.—Jonathan Swift
7. A woman, a spaniel, and a walnut tree, The more they're beaten, the better they be.—Thomas Fuller
8. Women are to be talked to as below men and above children.—Lord Chesterfield
9. Women, destined to be obedient, ought to be disciplined early to bear wrongs without murmuring.—H.H. Karnes
10. Women are nothing but machines for producing children.—Napoleon I
11. Can you recall a woman who ever showed you with pride her library?—Benjamin Decasseres
12. A learned woman is twice a fool.—Italian proverb
13. Girls begin to talk and to stand on their feet sooner than boys because weeds always grow up more quickly than good crops.—Martin Luther
14. The wife ought not to have any feelings of her own but join with her husband.—Plutarch
15. Nature intended women to be our slaves. . . . What a mad idea to demand equality for women!—Napoleon I

Sampler from Hawthorne

questions

Directions: Read the following poem and be prepared to respond to your teacher's questions.

1. Characterize Mr. Bronte

2. What behavior does he expect of his daughters?

3. In what way did the daughters show their passions?

4. What were the phantoms to which Mr. Bronte was impervious?

5. Ignoring the portion between the dashes, explain the last sentence.

His daughter Charlotte said to Mr. Brontë,
"Papa, I've been writing a book." "Have you, my dear?"
Deep in a sermon, Mr. Brontë let
The news float on the top of his attention;
The part that answered easily, without
Troubling the thought beneath. Embroidery
And painting china, even scribbling verse
On the romantic aspects of the tomb
Were all fit occupation for a female,
Though placed, in his mind, after baking bread,
Sweeping the rugless floors, making more comfortable
As was his daughters' duty, Mr. Brontë, père. Her father
Read on untroubled, even when he heard,
"—want you to read it." "I'm afraid," he said,
"It'll try my eyes too much." That settled it;
Victorian daughters never questioned these
Oracular pronouncements. But some words blew back
Which shattered harshly Mr. Brontë's peace.
"Printed," he heard, and put his paper down.
Composure crashed into a hundred bits
Of horrified conjuncture. "My dear, the expense!
It's sure to be a loss. Who knows your name?"
Sputtered poor Mr. Brontë. Not her father, surely,
Eyeing his staid, reserved, and grey-eyed daughter
In shocked harassment, while the presses thundered
Her fame all over England. One can but admire
The imperviousness of this Victorian gentleman
To phantoms, whose gigantic shadows stalked
About his house, wild creatures of the moors
Grinned at his windows, howlings shook the room,
Terror and passion and pity and sudden death
Rattled their thunders over his unheeding ears,
Drinking his port, watching his daughters mend
Neatly, his cotton stockings. Decorous, prim,
His daughters battled werewolves of the air
And pressed their father's clothing. Slain by the same white sword
The iron maidens went down one by one,
No groan distressing Papa. O Victorian daughters,
In whose prim bosoms lawless passions raged,
Kept safe within a framed gentility—
Who scribbled with weak eyes by candlelight
After Papa was safely fed and bedded,
The housework done, the pain suppressed, the hope
Disowned, the passionate words confined to paper—
The sampler worked in savage virgins' blood.¹

—Francis Minturn Howard

¹Ann Stanford, ed., *Women Poets in English* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), 248.

Two 19th-Century Rebels

Directions: Read about two women who dared to live independently.

Kate Chopin, author of *The Awakening*, and Mary Cassatt, the American Impressionist painter, lived in the same era under the same societal rules, and both had the intelligence and courage to defy the conventions of their society.

Chopin (1850–1904), happily married and mother of six children, had a husband who allowed her independence and supported her unconventional dress and actions. She was widowed at the age of thirty-one. Although she and her husband had originally settled in New Orleans, they were living in a small town in Natchitoches (năk í tōsh) Parish, La. when Oscar died. Kate, in a most unwomanly way, took over his business responsibilities and his debts and dressed and acted unconventionally. With her children, she returned to St. Louis to live with her mother and to write. Although her editors repeatedly asked her to make the women characters in her stories more modest, they printed her work, enabling her to support herself and her children. Her unconventional heroines and daring subject matter raised many eyebrows. With the publication of *The Awakening* in 1899, she was denounced and shunned by friends, acquaintances, and fellow club-members. A publisher refused her next work. After her untimely death in 1904, her work was virtually ignored until rediscovered by feminists in the late 1950s. It remained narrowly read until the 1980s.

Cassatt (1844–1926), who never married, lived in Pennsylvania where she studied art. In 1865 she dared to go to Paris to study. She remained there, a woman alone for most of her life. Later her family moved to France, and her sister often served as a model. She later became an Impressionist, highly influenced by Edgar Degas, and was the only American to exhibit with the French Impressionists. She and Berthe Morisot, a French painter, were the only female Impressionists. Cassatt primarily painted women, often with children. Her women were not Madonnas (the religious ones), and neither wealthy wives nor street women, the types usually painted by male artists. They were ordinary, strong, determined women of independent minds. About the time Chopin published her novel, Mary Cassatt returned to the United States. Newspapers ignored her fame as an artist; they merely noted that she had the smallest Pekinese in the world. She began to escort wealthy Americans to Europe to encourage them to buy Impressionist paintings. Although her eyesight failed, she continued to have exhibits, giving the profits to women's suffrage efforts. She outlived Kate Chopin, a partner in changing the role of women, by twenty-two years.

Both Chopin and Cassatt were 20th-century women in a 19th-century world.

Kate Chopin's home



The Story of an Hour

Directions: Read the following story.

Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death.

It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half concealing. Her husband's friend Richards was there, too, near her. It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard's name leading the list of "killed." He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message.

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.

There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul.

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all quiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.

There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.

She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams.

She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought.

There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air.

Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will—as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been.

When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under her breath: "free, free, free!" The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.

She did not stop to ask if it were or were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial.

She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.

There would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination.

And yet she had loved him—sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!

“Free! Body and soul free!” she kept whispering.

Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission. “Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door—you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven’s sake open the door.”

“Go away. I am not making myself ill.” No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window.

Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long.

She arose at length and opened the door to her sister’s importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister’s waist, and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom.

Some one was opening the front door with a latchkey. It was Brently Mallard who entered, a little travel-stained, composedly carrying his grip-sack and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed at Josephine’s piercing cry; at Richards’ quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife.

But Richards was too late.

When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease—of joy that kills.¹

¹Barbara H. Solomon, ed., *The Awakening and Selected Stories of Kate Chopin* (New York: Signet Classic, 1976), 198–200.