



Kate Chopin

1850-1904

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- ▶ Born Katherine (Kate) O'Flaherty in St. Louis in 1850
 - ▶ Conservative Southern Family.
 - ▶ Thomas O'Flaherty, her father, was of Irish descent
 - ▶ Eliza Faris, her mother, was of French descent
 - ▶ The only one of the five children to live past 25
 - ▶ Graduated from the Academy of the Sacred Heart in 1868.
 - ▶ Curriculum geared toward modesty and submission.
 - ▶ She excelled in school and received awards and delivered the commencement address at her high school graduation.

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- ▶ Her father died in a train accident
 - ▶ Was raised by her mother, grandmother, and great grandmother.
 - ▶ Intelligent, strong women who had at one point run family businesses and raised children on their own
 - ▶ Strong influence that helped shape her own independence

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- ▶ Met Oscar Chopin and married him on June 9, 1870. She was 20
 - ▶ Move to New Orleans which was culturally split between French Creoles and the “Americans.”
 - ▶ Creole ancestry: mixture of French, Spanish, and African culture.
 - ▶ Chopin takes in this culture.
 - ▶ By the age of 28 she had 6 children (5 boys and 1 girl)
 - ▶ Oscar loved his wife and gave her more freedom than other men during that time

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- ▶ The couple's financial situation took a turn for the worse
 - ▶ They move to the rural Cloutierville, Louisiana, in 1879 before her 30th birthday.
 - ▶ Managed a plantation and a store
 - ▶ Kate's sophistication from New Orleans translates to flirtatiousness and independence in the gossip of this community.

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- ▶ Oscar dies in 1882 of malaria.
 - ▶ Kate is left with six children, debt, and a struggling family store to run.
 - ▶ Returns to St. Louis in 1884 to be with her mother
 - ▶ Her mother died soon after she moved to St. Louis
 - ▶ She starts to write and publish full-time.
 - ▶ As means of therapy and a way to support her family
 - ▶ She published short stories and articles in Atlantic Monthly, Vogue, and others

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- ▶ 1890- she finished her first novel, *At Fault*
 - ▶ Set in the Louisiana bayou
 - ▶ Two collections of short stories followed
 - ▶ Explored life in Louisiana
 - ▶ Traditional gender roles through the eyes of a female protagonist

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- ▶ *The Awakening* is published in 1899.
 - ▶ Chopin and her novel were scolded by the press for Edna's behavior.

 - ▶ It was called "shocking," "sickening," and "poison."

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- ▶ Kate Chopin died in 1904 of a brain hemorrhage.
 - ▶ Her writing was recovered by feminist scholars in the 1970s after 1969 publication of *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*.

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- ▶ Skills of observation- ability to translate life into perceptive stories.
 - ▶ Regionalist writer of the realist movement
 - ▶ (Artists and writers strove for detailed realistic and factual description. They tried to represent events and social conditions as they actually are, without idealization)
 - ▶ Set work in the south (Louisiana)
 - ▶ Not her writing style that made an impact
 - ▶ It was her thoughtful depiction of women searching for purpose beyond the confines of traditional gender roles
 - ▶ 19th century readers- thought her ideas were too controversial
 - ▶ It wasn't until later that her work was appreciated for the revolutionary writing that explored themes like marriage, gender roles, and identity in her works.

Background for the short story

- ▶ “The Story of an Hour”

A Few Things to Consider...

- ▶ African American men received the right to vote with the passage of the 15th Amendment in 1870.
- ▶ The Woman's Suffrage Movement was sidetracked by the Civil War.
- ▶ Women received the right to vote with the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920.

More Things to Consider...



- ▶ Property rights laws for married women had not been passed in all states in the United States as of 1890.
- ▶ Ownership of women's property was transferred to their husbands upon marriage.
- ▶ Divorce carried social stigma and property reverted to the husband.

From Farming to Industrial Living in the United States

- ▶ What traditional roles do you believe men and women fulfilled?
- ▶ Who had the power?
- ▶ Who handled child care?



Are men and women
free to choose their
roles today?

Roles of Men and Women Today

- ▶ Men and women are free to work in any profession they choose.
- ▶ Men or women may choose to work outside the home or inside the home.
- ▶ Many men opt to stay home to raise their children while their wives work.
- ▶ Men and women have a voice in government and serve in political office.