

Discussion of Class Readings Theme: Men and Women

Please post brief answers to as many of these questions as possible.

All students will be writing about all six readings for the next essay – which has not yet been assigned, so you should read the selections and respond to the discussions (which are what we would have done in a real classroom setting). Right now, we are discussing three of the six. More questions on the other stories will follow in a couple of days.

Press Ctrl + click or cut and paste into your browser to open hyperlinks for 1 through 6

1) An **essay** by Judy Syfers called “Why I Want a Wife”
<http://www.columbia.edu/~sss31/rainbow/wife.html>

- a) **What is the writer saying essentially: why does she want a wife? Is it because wants a same-sex relationship or is it something else?**
- b) **This is an example of satire. Please look up “satire.” Do you think her essay is a successful expose of what husbands expect? Is it funny or dated (it was written 50 years ago during the height of the Women’s Rights movement). Is what is says about husbands offensive or is it a criticism of what women actually put up with?**
- c) **Notice what she says about what is expected when a family goes on a vacation: whose children are being taken care of? (Notice the power of one word: is it “our” or “my”?)**

2) A very short story called “The Story of an Hour”:
<http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/webtexts/hour/>

The story is told in real time, which means it takes an hour, hence its title. It also has **irony** at the end and foreshadowing at the beginning: “[...]Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble.”

- a) **Notice that the wife’s first name is not said right away. Why do you think that is?**
- b) **How old would you say this married couple is? Do they have children?**
- c) **Were you disturbed by her reaction to the news of the husband’s death?**

- d) When she speaks of being “free,” what does freedom mean? Do you want to get married one day? Do you feel you will lose your freedom when you get married?

If marriage is being criticized, why do people still get married and why do gay and lesbian couples want to get married? Is marriage for emotional security or financial security?

- e) When Mrs. Mallard dies, why does she die? What do the other characters think is the reason for her death? (We know the real reason, but they do not.)
- f) Do you think the narrator, who shows the woman’s thoughts, is criticizing men?

But notice: she says, “There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature.” Perhaps she is being fair to or critical of both men and women.

3) A short story by Bobbie Ann Mason called “Shiloh”:
<http://english204-dcc.blogspot.com/2011/05/shiloh.html>

- a) Who are the main characters? Why is there a conflict? What has caused a severe rift between them?
- b) What does the husband, Leroy, do to pass the time? Are these things we expect of a man to do?
- c) What does the wife, Norma Jean, do to keep busy? Why do you think she involves herself in so many activities? Which one of them seems unusual for a woman to do?
- d) Why do they go to Shiloh? What is Shilo? Do you think it is symbolic?
- e) Unlike with much older stories, this one was written fairly recently, the 1980s and it has references to actual song and movie titles. Do you like to see and read about actual things when you watch films and read stories? What is the appeal of including such things?
- f) Notice the reference to a dust cover’s color (a bed skirt). What meaning does it have if any? Note: good writing should include sensory appeal, words that appeal to our five senses. It is easy to appeal to our senses of sight and hearing, not so much to our senses of taste, touch, and smell. (In movies, we can see and hear beautiful and ugly things, but we cannot experience the other sensations.)

Use this as a suggestion to include specific details: real places and real brands, visual details when you do your own writing. Think of creating pictures in the minds of your readers.

g) Google who was Norma Jean and who was the man that was called “The King” (Leroy means king). Why do you think the author named her couple after two famous American cultural icons. It is highly doubtful she just pulled names out of a hat.