



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1999 Volume I: Women's Voices in Fiction

Gothic and the Female Voice: Examining Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"

Curriculum Unit 99.01.07

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Introduction

As urban schools attempt to expand the list of multicultural readings assigned to high school students, women writers are often still excluded from the curriculum. The unit, "Gothic and the Female Voice: Examining Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*" is intended for a college preparatory English class that focuses on American Literature in its historical context. The unit will follow one on Edgar Allan Poe's stories and poetry. While I plan to use the unit with a class of sophomores, it is easily adaptable to any secondary level English class.

The New Haven school system has proclaimed a district-wide literacy focus. I teach at an inner-city magnet high school for students interested in careers in science or business. Often, the students in sophomore English do not read at grade level and have great difficulty with writing. In Connecticut, high school sophomores also take a standardized response to literature test which focuses on reading comprehension and writing skills. This unit is intended to address both high-achieving and lower-level English students with opportunities for reading aloud, guided note taking if necessary, small group activities, extensive writing practice and intense literary analysis. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" is already included in my school's sophomore English textbook, McDougal-Littell *Language of Literature*. The text provides vocabulary exercises, comprehension questions and suggested writing activities. The mere fact that "The Yellow Wallpaper" has become so frequently anthologized is monumental. After all, Gilman had difficulty getting the melancholy story published at all.

I prefer to use thematic approaches to teaching literature, and I strongly emphasize the importance of studying literature within its social and historical context. Therefore, I found the textbook assignments and teacher resources insufficient. Furthermore, because I teach adolescents I try to open discussions that allow students to be exposed to a variety of perspectives and discussions of nontraditional roles in society. I've found a feminist interpretation of Gilman's story came naturally to me. I also decided that since much of the course is rather male dominated, it would be fitting to present this particular story with a somewhat feminist slant. At the same time, completing only a feminist reading, analyzing only the narrator's confinement as the cause of her madness, is too rational and too obvious an approach. Elements of the irrational exist in the story as well. There is evidence that the wallpaper itself is the primary cause of her madness, and opens the story up for interpretation as a gothic tale. This unit aims to provide teachers and students with entry points for

analyzing "The Yellow Wallpaper" within either context.

Lastly, a story like "The Yellow Wallpaper," which raises questions more than provides answers, is a teacher's favorite for any literature class. The story provides a literature class with endless issues for discussion, areas for debate and topics for writing practice.

Summary of "The Yellow Wallpaper"

In "The Yellow Wallpaper," the narrator suffers from a nervous condition, and her husband, who was a doctor, recommends that she recuperate in solitude. He has forbidden her to write, because he insists it is too taxing, so she writes her journal in secret. She sleeps in a large room she believes was once a nursery. The room contains a bed, barred windows and ugly yellow wallpaper. The woman slowly becomes obsessed with the hideous wallpaper. She stares at the pattern and eventually decides that it depicts a woman trapped behind bars. Ultimately, she locks herself in the room and starts to peel the paper off the walls. She begins to think that she is a part of the wallpaper pattern and crawls along the floor following the pattern. Her husband returns home to find her crawling along the floor. He faints across her path, and she continues to crawl over him.

Objectives & Strategies

For instructor use, the study of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" is presented within two major contexts which are then divided into subsections as outlined below:

I. The Narrator and Female Voice

- Historical context
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman biography
- Gilman's essay "Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper"
- Realism

II. Gothic Genre

- Defining gothic and female gothic genre
- The theme of madness

Each background section should be used to lead class discussion. Some sections can also be provided as additional reading handouts for students, especially those on history, Gilman's life and gothic genre. The sections are intended to inspire students to complete a general literary interpretation of the text, using biography, history, genre and the concept of literary voice as a basis for analysis. The most in-depth and more complex analysis of voice and realism should be the final lessons of the unit and should take place after the

students achieve more than a basic understanding of the story.

Sample classroom lessons require students to research, analyze, connect to background knowledge, connect to current issues and write personal responses. To frame the unit, students will also be guided through pre-reading, reading and post-reading exercises.

The unit provides both full lessons, which are numbered (Lesson I, II, etc.) and mini-lessons. Full lessons are aimed to take one block of 90 minutes or two 45-minute class periods. Full lessons might include reading, an activity and some class discussion in the time allotted. Typically, mini-lessons should be scheduled for 20-30 minutes of class time. Mini-lessons are designed as single activities that do not include reading or class discussion in the time allotted.

The lessons provided include creative and practical approaches to synthesizing information rather than tests or quizzes. A sample writing task assessment has been provided in attachment three. The pedagogical advantage of creative and practical approaches as well as the use of task assessments is that each approach requires students apply instead of simply report their knowledge of "The Yellow Wallpaper." As a result, students achieve a better understanding of the literature and experience greater retention.

Mini-Lesson: Pre-Reading/Brainstorming

This assignment allows students to look at what they already know about the issues that will be raised in the story. For a pre-reading exercise, allow students to freewrite about insanity or mental illness. Ask them to respond to stereotypes about mental illness; refer to movies or books that talk about mental illness; or give a description of someone with a mental illness. Students should have 20-30 minutes to complete this activity. The estimated length of the writing sample is one to two pages. Students might be asked to save these responses for reference after reading and analyzing the story as a class.

Lesson I: During-Reading/Note taking

The main objective of a during-reading exercise is to provide students with a framework for taking notes on the reading. In this exercise, students will be asked to trace any examples of the narrator's deteriorating mind as they read. Students will be asked to list any examples of the following:

- (a) first, the narrator's loss of control over her thoughts
- (b) the narrator's hallucinations
- (c) the narrator's growing paranoia
- (d) the narrator's obsessions with various ideas/things

Instructors may utilize Attachment 1, Analyzing the Narrator's Symptoms, for this lesson. The lesson should take two full 45-minute class sessions. For classes where the story might be too complex for silent reading, allow students to read aloud and guide them through finding examples.

Contexts

The Narrator and the Female Voice

"Voice" is a rather vague term used in analyzing literature. It can mean the author's tone, a poem's speaker or the point of view from which a novel is told. When I think about voice in relation to "The Yellow Wallpaper," I think in terms of how a person communicates oneself – how the story is told – beyond the words the narrator provides. I imagine the idea of voice to encompass the narrator's language and actions as well as the author's motives for writing. In essence, I see the story itself as the author's voice as much as it is the narrator's voice too. We can take this idea one step further and say that the students' interpretations of the story represent their voices. Therefore, writing is synonymous with "voice".

The story is a first person narrative. Throughout reading, it is useful to list the impressions that the narrator leaves on the reader. She describes her first impressions of the house, of her husband's efforts and her reactions to the medical treatment. For example, on the first page of the story, the narrator says, "John is a physician, and perhaps – (I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind) – perhaps that is one reason I do not get well faster."¹ Here, the reader's first impression of the narrator is that she is both rather aware and perceptive. Her character is also revealed in her writing style. As the reader observes the narrator's mental breakdown, the sentences in the story become shorter and more disconnected.

As readers follow the narration of Gilman's story, much of what happens in the story seems distorted or unexplained. For example, the narrator has hardly begun her struggle with following the pattern of the wallpaper before she says, "There are things in that paper that nobody knows but me, or ever will."² It is obvious that isolation did not cure the narrator from her illness. In fact, it made her condition worse. It is also unclear, however, whether or not the narrator believed she was actually sick at all. In this sense, students might find the narration of the story unreliable. An example of her erratic narration is her first assessment of her husband's good intentions, which contrasts her later assessment of his cruelty for preventing her from writing. At the same time, one who is sick rarely understands what is happening oneself.

In order to understand the events, students must make inferences based on details that the narrator does provide. Encourage students to read with a critical eye. It is important for a reader to allow him/herself to perceive ideas in the story the same way the narrator does, whether it makes sense to the reader or not. Tell students to examine the narrator's perceptions and actions in order to critique her behavior and her retelling of the experience.

The Narrator and Female Voice: Charlotte Perkins Gilman Biography (1860 - 1935)

Born in Hartford, Connecticut, Charlotte Anna Perkins was the daughter of Mary Fitch, a librarian, and Frederick Beecher Perkins, a magazine editor. She was the grand-niece of Catherine Beecher, an advocate of domestic feminism; Harriet Beecher Stowe, abolitionist and author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; and Isabella Beecher Hooker, a suffragist. She was raised in a poverty stricken home with her mother after her parents' divorce.

In her autobiography, Gilman describes her mother's expressions of affection toward her daughter. In an effort to teach her children not to expect emotional support, she showed affection toward her daughter only when Charlotte was asleep. She describes her efforts to stay awake as a young child so she could experience her mother's caresses and whispers of love. As a young woman, she insisted on paying her mother for room and

board. She dropped out of college and supported herself as a teacher and artist.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman grew up to suffer from depression, but she also spent the later part of her life lecturing, writing and teaching of the importance of economic independence for women. The example established by her great-aunts and her mother surely influenced Gilman's ideas. A self-educated intellectual, Charlotte Perkins Gilman was caught between marriage and work when her fiancé proposed. In 1884, Charlotte married Walker Stetson, an artist. She tried to submit to the traditional roles of a nineteenth century wife.

When her daughter was born a year later, Charlotte suffered from what we now call severe postpartum depression, which lasted almost four years. She was treated by a famous Philadelphia nerve specialist, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, who prescribed a "rest cure" for Gilman's "nervous condition" that forced her into inactivity with no physical or mental stimulation until she recovered. She said of herself, "I went home and obeyed these directions for some three months and came so near the border of utter mental ruin that I could see over".³

To preserve what was left of her sanity, Charlotte eventually disregarded Dr. Mitchell's advice, left her husband and moved to Pasadena, California. A few years later, Walter married Charlotte's best friend and Katherine, Charlotte and Walter's daughter, was sent to live with them. Remarkably, the three remained friends. For the next five years, Gilman traveled and began to rethink attitudes and assumptions about women in society. She wrote her most famous work, *Women and Economics*, in 1898. She gave lectures about women's issues, started a magazine, *The Forerunner*, and began publishing poems and articles. "The Yellow Wallpaper," in its direct protest of doctors' "rest cures" for women sparked Dr. S. Weir Mitchell himself to change his treatment for similar cases.

In 1900, Charlotte married George Houghton Gilman and lived happily with him until his death in 1934. At the age of 72, Gilman was diagnosed with cancer. She continued writing for a few more years, finishing her autobiography. On August 17, 1935, when the pain of the disease began to prevent her from working, Gilman committed suicide. She left a farewell note for her family, ". . . it is the simplest of human rights to choose a quick and easy death in place of a slow and horrible one . . . I have preferred chloroform to cancer".⁴

The Narrator and Female Voice: Historical Context of "The Yellow Wallpaper"

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is probably Gilman's best known short story. The story clearly dramatizes Gilman's own struggle with depression, writing, and living in a male-dominated society.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman actually had difficulty publishing the story. Submitted first to William Dean Howells and later passed on to Horace Scudder, editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, the story was rejected because of its melancholy nature. One point for student discussion might be whether Mr. Scudder would have also rejected one of Edgar Allan Poe's stories for the same reason. Gilman's story was finally published in 1892 in *The New England Magazine*.

During the nineteenth century in America, the nation was moving toward a more consumer-oriented society. With the Industrial Revolution and the end of the Civil War, society changed, and money became increasingly important. While what is known as the Gilded Age brought more women into the workforce, few women actually supported themselves. Young women who were working were often expected to turn their wages over to their parents, and wives were expected to turn wages over to their husbands. Women who were not in the workforce were burdened with domestic duties. Neither marriage nor work really loosened the boundaries placed on women; each situation simply offered a different set of rules.

Nineteenth century doctors accepted the idea that a woman's energy was centered around her reproductive organs. When a woman suffered a medical problem, doctors often diagnosed the problem as a problem with channeling energy. Since reproductivity was central to a nineteenth century wife's life, doctors often concluded that a "sick" woman was out of sync with her reproductive organs.

In addition, upper class women made ideal patients. Their husband's bank accounts " . . . seemed almost inexhaustible," and the patients were usually " . . . submissive and obedient to the doctor's orders."⁵ Charlotte Perkins Gilman herself was treated for a similar "nervous condition" as that of the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper." Her physician, Silas Weir Mitchell, was well known in the United States for his "rest cure," also called the "Weir Mitchell Treatment." Mitchell believed, as a rule, that no harm was done by rest. He often required patients to stay in bed for six to eight weeks. Most female patients were forbidden to sit up, sew, write, or read.⁶

It appears that no effort to probe the symptoms of mental illness was made. In the case of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and in the case of the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper," the rest cure failed. One analysis of such failure is that the rest cure simply locked Gilman, her narrator, and all "sick" women into a extremely submissive, helpless role. As a reader of "The Yellow Wallpaper" can conclude, the rest cure only " . . . deepened a person's psychic unrest".⁷

The Narrator and Female Voice: Realism - An analysis of "The Yellow Wallpaper"

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's story is a realistic depiction of what happens to the mind when faced with forced inactivity. It is also a realistic representation of human beings' desire to overcome feelings of uselessness.

The story illustrates the need for a woman to be independent. The story examines one woman's descent into madness due to inactivity. In a much broader sense, however, the story also examines the struggles between marriage and career, social expectations and personal goals. In reading about Gilman's own life, the story also clearly reflects her own feelings of being trapped in a marriage. While the narrator has lost much of her independence and self-determination, the determination that does remain for her is in her desire to tear down the wallpaper and set the mysterious woman free. In her own life, Gilman similarly tried to free herself and other women. "Once she left her own husband, she became a woman of the world - a creator of her own ideas - an educator of other women".⁸ In a sense, the narrator of the story is also a creator of her own ideas. She creates her own reality in fact, perhaps as an effort to cope with her inactivity. At least obsessing about the wallpaper has given her something to occupy her mind. Without a doubt, the narrator is a character with real emotions and real mental deterioration.

It is important to remember, and to remind students, that the entire story is presented only through the narrator's perspective. At the same time, most of the background material provided is from Gilman's autobiography, and from her own perspective. While Gilman's story can be called realism, because of its connection to her own life, it is real only to Gilman, the author. Realism is defined as, " . . . not a direct or simple reproduction of reality but a system of conventions producing a lifelike illusion of some 'real' world outside the text, by processes of selection, exclusion, description, and manners of addressing the reader."⁹ Because Gilman was really free from hurting anyone in real life, she was able to imagine some of the story's details. Therefore, the story is part fact and fiction - requiring students to read from a sharp critical eye.

Gilman's narrator represents a battling woman. In the story, she is battling the wallpaper and its mystery; in its historical context, she is battling patriarchal social codes. For these reasons, the story carries with it a controversial edge. "Her gripping tale of a new mother's descent into madness brought to light the inequity

between men and women within the family and the overwhelming nature of Victorian social norms for womanhood".¹⁰

Lesson II: Post-Reading/Drawing Conclusions

The main objective of this lesson is to allow students to draw their own conclusions about the narrator's state of mind in Gilman's short story. In small groups of three or four, students will discuss the examples listed during the during-reading activity and attempt to make a diagnosis of the narrator's illness. Students should also suggest other possible treatments for the narrator.

After reading and discussing the story in class, student can use the internet to research psychological disorders to assist in this activity. Several useful web sites are listed on Attachment two, Web site Resource Page. In the final ten to twenty minutes of class, groups should present their findings orally for the class.

The Narrator and Female Voice: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's essay

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper," Catherine Golden, ed. *The Captive Imagination: A Casebook on "The Yellow Wallpaper"*, NY: Feminist Press, 1991.

Why I Wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper"

by Charlotte Perkins Gilman

As it appeared in *The Forerunner*, October, 1913

Many and many a reader has asked that. When the story first came out, in the *New England Magazine* about 1891, a Boston physician made protest in *The Transcript*. Such a story ought not to be written, he said; it was enough to drive anyone mad to read it.

Another physician, in Kansas I think, wrote to say that it was the best description of incipient insanity he had ever seen, and -- begging my pardon -- had I been there?

Now the story of the story is this:

For many years I suffered from a severe and continuous nervous breakdown tending to melancholia -- and beyond. During about the third year of this trouble I went, in devout faith and some faint stir of hope, to a noted specialist in nervous diseases, the best known in the country. This wise man put me to bed and applied the rest cure, to which a still-good physique responded so promptly that he concluded there was nothing much the matter with me, and sent me home with solemn advice to "live as domestic life as far as possible," to "have but two hours' intellectual life a day," and "never to touch pen, or pencil again" as long as I lived. This was in 1887.

I went home and obeyed those directions for some three months, and came so near the borderline of utter mental ruin that I could see over.

Then, using the remnants of intelligence that remained, and helped by a wise friend, I cast the noted specialist's advice to the winds and went to work again -- work, the normal life of every human being; work, in which is joy and growth and service, without which one is a pauper and a parasite -- ultimately recovering some measure of power.

Being naturally moved to rejoicing by this narrow escape, I wrote, "The Yellow Wallpaper," with its embellishments and additions, to carry out the ideal (I never had hallucinations or objections to my mural decorations) and sent a copy to the physician who so nearly drove me mad. He never acknowledged it.

The little book is valued by alienists and as a good specimen of one kind of literature. It has, to my knowledge, saved one woman from a similar fate -- so terrifying her family that they let her out into normal activity and she recovered.

But the best result is this. Many years later I was told that the great specialist had admitted to friends of his that he had altered his treatment of neurasthenia since reading "The Yellow Wallpaper."

It was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from begin driven crazy, and it worked.

Mini-Lesson: Writing a Response

Students will respond to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's essay, "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper'" (provided on previous page) in a short first-draft essay written in the first person point of view. This assignment gives students the opportunity to understand the author's purpose for writing the story in addition to providing students evidence of Gilman's efforts to educate other women during her time. The students will be assessed for completing a personal response to the author's purpose. One 90 minute class period or two 45 minute classes will be needed for this assignment. This works best as an "initial response," therefore, editing and revising are not included as a part of the assignment.

Mini-Lesson: Connect to Today

Students will write a final-draft essay that makes a connection between the struggles of the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and those of women in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Students will be asked to brainstorm how they view a woman's struggle with the demands and expectations of marriage and a woman's work and independence today. Students might be asked to interview a teacher, family friend, parent or extended family member to complete this assignment.

Students will be assessed for following essay form and for making at least three connections between the struggles of nineteenth century women and present day issues. The task assessment provided in attachment three can be modified to fit this assignment. This lesson should be expanded to include proofreading and editing workshops in class. A final, formal draft should result after several days of writing instruction.

Gothic Genre: Defining Gothic

The gothic novel dominated English literature during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. Often, architectural ruins, monasteries, forlorn characters, elements of the supernatural and overall feelings of melancholy and madness prevailed in gothic works. It seems likely that the gothic novel was a reaction to the increased disillusionment in Enlightenment thinking. The gothic genre's bizarre images and obsessions with death, evil and mystery reflect a reaction to the age of reason, order and politics of nineteenth century England as well.

A story of terror and suspense, gothic has also been defined as, ". . . a popular woman's romance dealing with endangered heroines."¹¹ A more comprehensive definition can be found in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. It states, ". . . the best of them opened up to fiction the realm of the irrational and of the perverse impulses and the nightmarish terrors that lie beneath the orderly surface of the civilized mind . . ."

The gothic genre proves to be a favorite of high school students. Most students become fascinated with examinations of horror, the supernatural, psychology and the mind. Gothic works naturally generate psychological responses from readers, therefore motivating students to search for deeper meanings and a variety of analysis.

Gothic Genre: The Female Gothic

Ellen Moers is known for establishing the term "female gothic" as an element of literary analysis. According to Moers, female gothic refers to writings where ". . . fantasy predominates over reality, the strange over the commonplace, and the supernatural over the natural, with one definite auctorial intent: to scare".¹² Gilman's story, "The Yellow Wallpaper" has been called gothic because of its focus on madness and its horrifying conclusion. Some critics even chose to compare Gilman's story to the stories of Edgar Allan Poe, because of its remarkable depiction of the deterioration of the human mind. In addition, Gilman's narrator's madness is focused on the wallpaper, serving a similar function to Poe's famous black cat or tell-tale heart.

Almost 100 years before Gilman's story was published, Ann Radcliffe established a standard for a gothic novel written by a woman writer. Radcliffe's novel's central figure is a young woman who was a persecuted victim and courageous heroine. Applying this definition to "The Yellow Wallpaper," it is clear to see why the story has been called gothic. Further complicating the analysis of Gilman's story as a gothic tale is Moers' discussion of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. A novel about creation, birth and its traumatic aftermath, Shelley established fear, guilt, depression, and anxiety as commonplace reactions to birth. In real life, Gilman's own nervous condition followed the birth of her daughter, Katherine, and paralleled the narrator's madness which revolves around the yellow wallpaper of an old nursery. Unlike many some gothic tales, Gilman's story is not simply about a haunted environment or an estranged woman. The story connects both setting and character with a chilling effect.

Lesson III: Realism vs. Gothic Horror

In groups of three or four, ask students to brainstorm what happens when we try to apply a real diagnosis to a work of fiction. While Gilman's story is based on real events, it is still a short story. Groups should then prepare at least three statements to make that prove "The Yellow Wallpaper" is an example of realism. Then, they should prepare at least three statements to prove that "The Yellow Wallpaper" is a gothic horror story. Students may use Gilman's essay "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper'" as a resource here as well. This assignment can be presented orally or written. Allot one 45 minute class or half of a 90 minute class period.

Lesson IV: Culminating Class Discussion - Class Debates

In an in-class debate, students will be divided into four groups. Each student will be asked to make one solid point to defend the group's argument. The debates may or may not be settled, but will provide students with a forum for drawing some conclusions about the story. Students will be assessed for taking an active part in the debate. Debate topics are "How Responsible is John?" and "Is the Narrator Triumphant or is she Defeated?" A class debate handout is provided in attachment four. Regardless of length of class periods, allow at least two days for this assignment – a preparation day and a presentation day.

Gothic Genre: The Theme of Madness

The narrator in Gilman's story is one of many patients in American literature (and film) who ". . . searches desperately for understanding but, following accepted medical advice or that of loved ones, lose their mind."¹³ At the same time, one can analyze Gilman's story as one of a practical husband and an imaginative wife. If the narrator's creativity is defined as feminine, or weak, and society values the useful while rejecting anything else as nonsense – what happens to the imagination? It goes mad. When Gilman's narrator give in to her madness, her obsession over the wallpaper becomes the only part of her life that she can control.

The 1944 film *Gaslight*, is a great companion to "The Yellow Wallpaper" in relation to the theme of madness. Starring Ingrid Bergman, Charles Boyer and Joseph Cotton, the film won Bergman her first academy award. Its heroine is on the verge of a complete mental breakdown when she realizes that her dashing husband has been trying to drive her insane in order to locate her family jewels, which are hidden in their London home. While most students dread watching old, black and white films, this film is so full of suspense and mystery it is highly recommended.

The following speech is in given by the heroine, Paula, in the final moments of the film. Here, she finally confronts her husband as he begs for her help and forgiveness,

Have you gone mad, my husband? Or is it I who am mad? Yes, of course, that's it. I am mad. I'm always losing things and forgetting them, and I must find them If I were not mad I could have helped you. Whatever you have done, I could have pitied and protected you. Because I am mad I hate you. Because I am mad, I have betrayed you. Because I am mad I am rejoicing in my heart, without a shred of pity, without a shred of regret, watching you go with glory in my heart.¹⁴

The dramatic scene concluded with this speech works as a visual element for students in connecting the madness theme from "The Yellow Wallpaper" to another work.

Lesson V: Audio-visual Connection - Gaslight

Provide students with a copy of the heroine, Paula's final speech in the film. Ask them to work in pairs to write such a speech for Gilman's narrator. If the narrator was only "on the verge" of madness, and she was able to "snap out of it" in a sense, what would she say to her husband? Students should write their responses in the format of a dramatic monologue and be prepared to perform a dramatic reading in class. Regardless of length of class periods, allow at least two days for this assignment – a preparation day and a presentation day.

Lesson VI: Creative Writing

Ask students to write a short story using madness as a theme. Students should model their main character after the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper," focusing their hero/heroine's madness on one thing. Have students share stories aloud or create illustrations or video clips for their story. This assignment can be given as an out-of-class writing assignment.

Attachment 1

Analyzing the Narrator's Symptoms

Examples of narrator losing control over own ideas/thoughts:

(a) "I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes . . . I take pains to control myself -- before him, at least, and that makes me very tired." (p. 25)

(b) "It is getting to be a great effort for me to think straight." (p. 32)

Examples of narrator's growing obsession:

(a) "I never saw a worse paper in my life. It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronouncing enough to constantly irritate and provoke study." (p. 26)

(b) ". . . I determined for the thousandth time that I will follow that pointless pattern to some sort of conclusion." (p. 31)

Examples of narrator's growing paranoia:

(a) "Of course I never mention it to them anymore -- I am too wise -- but I keep watch of it all the same." (p. 32)

(b) "The fact is I am getting a little afraid of John. He seems very queer sometimes, and even Jennifer has an inexplicable look." (p. 35)

(c) "I know she was studying that pattern, and I am determined that nobody shall find it out but myself!" (p. 35)

Examples of narrator's hallucinations:

(a) "At night in any kind of light, in twilight, candlelight, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight, it [the wallpaper] becomes bars! The outside pattern, I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be." (p. 34)

(b) ". . . the only thing I can think of that it is like is the color of the paper! A yellow smell."
(p. 37)

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "The Yellow Wallpaper." Catherine Golden, ed. *The Captive Imagination: A Casebook on "The Yellow Wallpaper"*, NY: Feminist Press, 1991.

Attachment 2

Web site Resources

1. www.health.yahoo.com
Yahoo! Health pages provide definitions, causes, incidences, risk factors, prevention, symptoms, treatment, prognosis & complications on various mental health conditions and disorders. The site also provides links to various health-related websites.
2. www.mentalhealth.com
The site provides descriptions of disorders, diagnosis, treatment, research, articles and links to related sites.
3. www.psychologyinfo.com
The site provides information on depression, but does place emphasis on depression in women.
4. www.Anxieties.com
The site provides general information, comments and suggestions on treating panic attacks, obsessive-compulsive disorder, phobias and post-traumatic stress disorder.
5. www.ocdresource.com
The site provides general information including a section on diagnosis and treatment of obsessive-compulsive disorder.
6. www.Schizophrenia.com
The site offers links to the top 200 psych websites. It also provides general information and statements from people diagnosed with schizophrenia.
7. www.depression.com
The site provides general information, but also discusses why women are at risk for depression. A link to information on post-partum depression is also included.
8. www.Depression-net.com
The site provides statistical information on depression.
9. www.wingofmadness.com
The main focus of this site is also depression and related disorders. The site examines why women are prone to depression and discusses related theories, biological aspects, and women's roles in society.

Attachment 3

Sample Essay Writing Task Assessment

<i>Criteria</i>	Points Possible 1. Notes/Graphic Organizer/Outline shows work in organizing information.					
	10 2. The thesis statement is stated in the introduction and clearly relevant to the story. For in class writing, a thesis statement may not be required, but a main idea must be clear.					
	10 3. The details are presented in a logical sequence. There are enough details to support the main idea. Details are related to the main idea or thesis statement.	20 4. At least three specific references to the text are made. Quotes are presented accurately and clearly explained. Quotes fit into the paragraph smoothly.	20 5. The paper examines meaning in the work - the paper does not simply summarize events or restate items from class notes or discussion.	20 6. The paper is neat & presentable, edited for clarity, spelling, and grammar.	10 7. The conclusion restates the thesis and summarizes the main points of the essay.	10
Total	100					
		Points Earned				

Attachment 4

Class Debate Topics

How responsible is John?

Argument 1 =

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is a story that allows us to view male doctors as misguided.

Use the details from the story to argue that the narrator's husband is controlling and insensitive, purposing confining his wife in order to force her to be dependent on him.

Argument 2 =

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is a story that presents two people who are both trapped in their gender roles. The narrator is a wife who is frustrated because she can't communicate what she really thinks and wants. Her husband, John, is a well-known doctor who isn't quite sure how to help her. Use the story to support this interpretation and give both the narrator and her husband the benefit of the doubt.

Is the Narrator Triumphant or is she Defeated?

Argument 3 =

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is a story about a woman who is confined and silenced. In the end, she is defeated as she finally gives in to madness and is found creeping along the floor of the room. Use the story to support that interpretation that she became completely dependent on her husband and was reduced to an infantile state.

Argument 4 =

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is a story about a woman, who though she is confined and silenced, triumphs. In the end, she achieves a greater sense of self as she acts out her madness. Use details from the story to argue that when the narrator creeps along the floor of the room, causes her husband to faint, and crawls over his body, she overcomes both her confinement and her silencing. She triumphs over her husband and male-dominated society.

@SH:Instructor's Resources Abrams, M. H. A Glossary of Literary Terms, 5th ed. NY: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1988. Annotation: A dictionary of literary terms is helpful for defining gothic, realism, and voice. This one had a better definition for gothic than Baldick's dictionary, listed below.

Ashby, Ruth and Deborah Gore Ohrn, eds. "Charlotte Perkins Gilman," *Herstory: Women Who Changed the World*. New York: Penguin Books USA, Inc., 1995. Annotation: Herstory is an anthology of essays about women reformers, writers and scientists of all ages and from various time periods.

Baldick, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. NY: Oxford University Press, 1990. Annotation: A dictionary of literary terms is helpful for defining gothic, realism, and voice. Bronte, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Editions Limited, Inc., 1992. Annotation: The novel is classic gothic story of a young governess who falls in love with her employer. Comparisons can be drawn between the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and the character of Bertha in *Jane Eyre*. Not the most popular version, this one is available through Barnes and Noble for \$3.00.

Cahill, Susan, ed. "Charlotte Perkins Gilman." *Writing Women's Lives: An Anthology of Autobiographical Narratives by Twentieth Century American Women Writers*. NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994. Annotation: The anthology includes autobiographical sketches of American women authors. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's excerpt is from her autobiography, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*.

<p>De Simone, Deborah M. (1995). "Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Feminization of Education." WILLA: Women in Literature and Life. Volume IV, 13-17. NY:</p>	<p>Assembly of the National Council of Teachers of English, 1998. Annotation:</p>	<p>This essay can also be found online. There is a link to it from the Charlotte Perkins Gilman website available through Yahoo!. De Simone discusses the life and literature of Charlotte Perkins Gilman within the context that Gilman wrote, ". . . in order to transform society by educating other women." The essay mostly discusses "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Herland.</p>
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Gaslight. Screenplay by Patrick Hamilton. Dir. George Cukor. Perf. Ingrid Bergman, Charles Boyer and Joseph Cotton. MGM, 1944. Annotation: The film is a great psycho-thriller that can be a companion to "The Yellow Wallpaper." An assignment using the film is provided relating the film to the story's theme of madness. Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar. The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. Annotation: Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's essays analyze the theme of the madwoman in the attic, referring to Bertha's character in Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre. While the entire book is well worth reading, the essay "Toward a Feminist Poetics" offers a detailed discussion of Gilman's story. As a whole, the essay examines the patriarchal standards that confine women.

Captive Imagination: A Casebook on "The Yellow Wallpaper", NY: Feminist Press, 1991.

Annotation: Gilman's short story of a woman's descent into madness "The Yellow Wallpaper." once her husband Catherine confines her to an old nursery and prevents her from writing. This edition was used to cite page numbers throughout the unit.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "The Yellow Wallpaper." Catherine Golden, ed. The

Golden, Catherine, ed. The Captive Imagination: A Casebook on "The Yellow Wallpaper". NY: Feminist Press, 1991. Annotation: This book is easily the most comprehensive resource I found. After failing to locate this book in several public libraries, I finally purchased it through amazon.com. The book

includes "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman's essay "'Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper'," and excerpts from Gilman's autobiography, The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In addition, the book provides essays on medicine in the nineteenth century, essays by and about Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, and

essays about American womanhood. The critical sections of the books

include essays on feminist literary analysis, comparisons of Gilman to Edgar Allan Poe, essays on analyzing the story as realism, and essays on writing.

Moers, Ellen. Literary Women: The Great Writers. NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976. Annotation: Literary Women examines the lives and work of women writers. Moers refers to Gilman's story only sparingly. The most useful portion of her analysis of women's literature is her discussion of genre, specifically the female gothic. Solomon, Barbara, ed. HERLAND and Selected Stories by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. New York: Penguin Books USA, Inc., 1992. Annotation: Herland is Gilman's novel about a feminist utopian community. The book also includes eighteen other short stories by Gilman, including "The Yellow Wallpaper."

Student Resources

Bronte, Charlotte. Jane Eyre. Hertfordshire, England: Wordsworth Editions Limited, Inc., 1992. Annotation: The novel is classic gothic story of a young governess who falls in love with her employer. Comparisons can be drawn between the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and the character of Bertha in Jane Eyre.

Captive
Imagination:
A Casebook
on "The
Yellow
Wallpaper",
NY: Feminist
Press, 1991.

Annotation:
Gilman's
short story
of a
woman's
descent into
madness
once her
husband
confines her
to an old
nursery and
prevents
her from
writing. This
edition was
used to cite
page
numbers
throughout
the unit.

Gilman,
Charlotte
Perkins.
"The
Yellow
Wallpaper."
Catherine
Golden, ed.
The

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "Why I Wrote The Yellow Wallpaper," Catherine Golden, ed. The Captive Imagination: A Casebook on "The Yellow Wallpaper". NY: Feminist Press, 1991. Annotation: Gilman's essay can be

found online, through the Charlotte Perkins Gilman website available through Yahoo!, or in the resource listed above The Captive Imagination. It has been provided within this curriculum unit for your convenience.

Solomon, Barbara, ed. HERLAND and Selected Stories by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. New York: Penguin Books USA, Inc., 1992. Annotation: Herland is Gilman's novel about a feminist utopian community. The book also includes eighteen other short stories by Gilman, including "The Yellow Wallpaper."

Endnotes

1Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "The Yellow Wallpaper," Golden, Catherine, ed. The Captive Imagination: A Casebook on "The Yellow Wallpaper". (NY: Feminist Press, 1991), 24. 2Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "The Yellow Wallpaper," Golden, Catherine, ed. The Captive Imagination: A Casebook on "The Yellow Wallpaper". (NY: Feminist Press, 1991), 32. 3Golden, Catherine. "One Hundred Years of Reading," The Captive Imagination: A Casebook on "The Yellow Wallpaper". (NY: Feminist Press, 1991), 22. 4Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "The Living Charlotte Perkins Gilman," Ashby, Ruth and Deborah Gore Ohrn, eds. Herstory: Women Who Changed the World. (NY: Penguin Books), 147. 5Ehrenreich, Barbara and Deirdre English, eds. "The Sick Women of the Upper Classes," Golden, Catherine, ed. The Captive Imagination: A Casebook on "The Yellow Wallpaper". (NY: Feminist Press, 1991), 96. 6Ehrenreich, Barbara and Deirdre English, eds. "The Sick Women of the Upper Classes," Golden, Catherine, ed. The Captive

Imagination: A Casebook on "The Yellow Wallpaper". (NY: Feminist Press, 1991), 97. 7Ehrenreich, Barbara and Deirdre English, eds. "The Sick Women of the Upper Classes," Golden, Catherine, ed. The Captive Imagination: A Casebook on "The Yellow Wallpaper". (NY: Feminist Press, 1991), 224. 8DeSimone, Deborah M. "Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Feminization of Education," WILLA: Women in Literature and Life. Volume IV. (NY: Assembly of the National Council of Teachers of English, 1998), 13. 9DeSimone, Deborah M. "Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Feminization of Education," WILLA: Women in Literature and Life. Volume IV. (NY: Assembly of the National Council of Teachers of English, 1998), 14. 10Hedges, Elaine. "Afterword to "The Yellow Wallpaper"," Golden, Catherine, ed. The Captive Imagination: A Casebook on "The Yellow Wallpaper". (NY: Feminist Press, 1991), 130. 11Baldick, Chris. The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms. (NY: Oxford University Press, 1990), 224. 12Moers, Ellen. Literary Women: The Great Writers . (NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976), 224. 13Berman, Jeffrey. "The Unrestful Cure," Golden, Catherine, ed. The Captive Imagination: A Casebook on "The Yellow Wallpaper". (NY: Feminist Press, 1991), 224.

14Gaslight. Screenplay by Patrick Hamilton. Dir. George Cukor. Perf. Ingrid

Bergman, Charles Boyer and Joseph Cotton. MGM, 1944.

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