

Explain why you believe that a character in your favorite assigned reading acted the way he or she did. Make sure you can support your explanation.

Student 1

I think that Mrs. Mallard acted the way she did because she wanted to grieve for her husband but was too distracted by the feeling of having her life back. She was sad that she had lost him but was excited to be "free".

When the story said that "she did not hear the sorry as many women have heard the same" I think that meant that most women are lost and do not have any knowledge of how to live their life without their husband and that she knew what she was going to do. She did not have to answer to anyone anymore. Also, I think she loved him but was not in love with him because she thought of marriage as being "powerful will bending her in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow creature." She was not fully happy with her life until she learned she was "free". Her life changed for the better in that one hour. She finally left the room, where she gained back all her independence, and walked down the stairs with her sister. Mrs. Mallard's husband walked through the door and their friend, Richard, tried to hide the sight of his wife's death but was too late.

At the beginning of the story they mentioned that they had taken great care "to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death." because she had heart trouble. At the end they said "when the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease -of joy that kills". I think this means that the doctors thought she had passed because she was so happy to see her husband alive after hearing he was dead but in reality she died of sadness because she knew that the life she had imagined with her husband's death was no longer an option. She died of a broken heart.

Student 2

I think that your explanation of this story was a very good one because just by reading your response, I understand the story better. Now it makes sense. When she thought her husband was dead she was sad but yet happy but when she realized that he wasn't dead her heart failed and she died because if she could not be free without him being dead, then she would be free by her own death.

Instructor

So, Student 1, thinking a little deeper... why do you think that Mrs. Mallard really responded the way she did?

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Student 2

Wow, I had not really thought about her dying from a broken heart! That definitely is the joy that kills. That makes me think about my grandma. At first after my grandpa died, my grandma was excited because she knew he was in heaven and in no more pain. She started doing things that she had not been able to do while he was sick. Eventually though, she really started missing her life she had with my grandpa, and we think she died of a broken heart and missing him. She wasn't sick at all. I know it's not the same as Mrs. Mallard, but it is amazing that a broken heart can kill someone.

Instructor

Very well done, Student 1. It is very interesting to consider that someone might be able to die just from a broken heart, Student 2. Now that you've got all of that nailed down, let's look at the symbolism. Think about the images we see...what is her name? What is Chopin showing us in the text?

Student 1

The story has a lot of symbolism. I will start with the armchair in the story in which Mrs. Mallard sits after secluding herself in her room upon hearing of her husbands' death is described as "comfortable" and "roomy." The chairs' location is also important, it is facing an open window, this symbolizes being open to change, and the fact that it is open shows that it is somewhat warm out suggesting life rather than the cold of winter symbolizing death. The adjectives "comfortable," "roomy," and "sank" symbolize a feeling of being embraced by the chair, a feeling of love and warmth. Through the open window she sees many other symbols furthering the feelings of

goodness in the reader. She sees the tops of trees that "were all quiver with the new spring life" symbolizing a new life to come, something new happening in her life. The setting of a "delicious breath of rain" in the air refers to the calmness after a storm when the sun comes back out. Kate Chopin is using this to refer to the death of Mrs. Mallard's husband and the new joyous life she may now lead that she is free of him. Also to be heard outside are the singing of birds and the notes of a distant song someone was singing, symbolizing an oncoming feeling of wellness, a build up to her realization that she is now free of the tyrannical rule of her husband. "She knew that she would when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death, the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely". When a couple gets married the vows state until death do they part, but Mr. and Mrs. Mallard took those vows literally. Mrs. Mallard and her husband's marriage seemed to have more problems than others.

Student 2

I think that Mr. Mallard's return probably symbolized just another dream crushed because of the marriage expectations of the time. Mrs. Mallard just couldn't take the disappointment anymore.

Instructor

Excellent discussion on symbolism!