

***The Awakening* Reading Questions**

Chapter 1

1. What might be meant by the title, *The Awakening*?
2. Explain how the parrot and the mockingbird are used to introduce this chapter. Consider their location and what they say.
3. Describe Léonce Pontellier. How is he a typical husband of the time?
4. What does the following quotation tell you about Léonce's attitude toward his wife? He looked "at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage."
5. What indications are there that the Pontellier marriage is strained?

Chapter 2

1. Describe Edna Pontellier.
2. Describe Robert. What kind of person is he?
3. What do you learn about Robert and Edna from their conversation at the end of this chapter?

Chapter 3

1. How does Léonce's behavior when he returns from the Klein Hotel reveal his attitude toward his wife?
2. How does he view Edna as a mother?
3. What shows the reader more signs of the marital conflict between the Pontelliers?
4. Discuss how sounds are used as a backdrop to the scene of disagreement between Léonce and Edna. How is the sea used as a symbol?
5. Why is Edna crying? Find the best word from the text to describe what she is feeling?
6. Was the argument resolved? Why or why not.

7. How does the gift Edna receives from her husband symbolize her marriage and most marriages of this time?

Chapter 4

1. What is a mother-woman? Notice which term comes first—why is that?
2. What satiric comment does the narrator make concerning “mother-woman”? Cite specific words that reveal the satiric nature of these comments.
3. What kind of woman is Edna?
4. Who is Adèle Ratignolle, and how is she the embodiment of the “mother-woman”?
5. How does the fact that Edna is not a Creole affect her relationship with others on Grand Isle?
6. Why does Edna hide the book she’s reading at the end of the chapter? How is this significant to her “awakening”?

Chapter 5

1. During the Middle Ages, courtly love was embodied in the behavior of a knight toward the fine lady he loved. He would prostrate himself before her, idealize her, carry her favor into battle, but never demonstrate physical love for her. How does Robert’s behavior toward Edna fit this pattern?
2. Who is described as a “faultless Madonna”? Is this a fitting allusion? Why?
3. What is the difference between Robert’s present attentions to Edna and his past attentions to Adèle Ratignolle?
4. What is the significance of Edna’s sketching in this chapter? Why does it, in a way, make sense that Edna is an artist?
5. How is the sea described?

Chapter 6

1. What question does Robert pose to Edna after Madame Ratignolle leaves? Why does this question pose a problem for Edna?
2. What does Edna start to realize about her life? Relate this to the title.
3. How is the sea used symbolically in this chapter?

Chapter 7

1. How has Edna changed during the course of the summer?
2. How are Edna Pontellier and Adèle Ratignolle contrasted in this chapter?
3. Why is Adele always in white?
4. How are the lady in black and the two lovers used symbolically in this chapter?
5. What does Edna remember feeling back when she was 12 years-old walking though the field? Why does she think of it now?
6. What experience did Edna have of love? Why did she marry Leonce?
7. What realities does Edna now face in regards to her husband and children?
8. How is the theme of “awakening” revealed in this chapter?
9. Is Edna responsible for her present state of unhappiness? Why or why not?

Chapter 8

1. Why does Adèle tell Robert to leave Edna alone? Why is he annoyed by this?
2. Do you think that Robert is being too friendly with Edna?
3. Alcee Arobin is introduced as a character. Why? How does he contribute to the story?
4. Where is Vera Cruz? What is its significance?

Chapter 9

1. Why are so many husbands and fathers present at Grand Isle?
2. Mademoiselle Reisz is introduced as a character. Why? How does she contribute to the story?
3. What adjectives might we use to describe her role in society?
4. In the past, what image has been evoked in Edna's mind by a certain musical passage? How is this a contrast to Edna's life up to this point?
5. What is Edna's response to the music of Mademoiselle Reisz? How is this related to the "awakening" theme in the novel?
6. What mythical or literary allusions are referenced? Why?
7. How do "those others" view Mlle. Reisz? Why does she only notice Edna?

Chapter 10

1. What realization does Edna come to as she walks to the water with her husband by her side?
2. How are images of sound and smell used as a backdrop to this scene?
3. How does Edna respond to swimming successfully for the first time? What simile is used?
4. What symbolism is present here?
5. Why does Edna swim back to shore? How has she changed?
6. In what way does Edna and Robert's behavior towards one another change at the end of this chapter? Why is this?

Chapter 11

1. How is the theme of rebellion against marriage shown in Edna's behavior when her husband returns?
2. How does this rebellion end?

3. Explain the symbolism with the cigar and wine.

Chapter 12

1. Why does Edna have trouble sleeping? Symbolic value here?
2. Edna goes to the Chênrière for mass. What does Edna do that she has never done before? What phrases are repeated?
3. What is Robert's reaction? In what position does this put Edna as far as her relationship with Robert is concerned?
4. How are the "lovers" used here?
5. Explain the conversation between Robert and Mariequita.
6. How does Edna feel as she and Robert sail to the Chênrière Caminada?
7. What is the significance of the plans Robert says he has for the future? What is Edna's response?

Chapter 13

1. How does Edna respond to the actual church service?
2. Who is Madame Antoine?
3. How do the 5 senses relate to Edna's awakening? Discuss their use in this chapter, esp. in the bedroom scene.
4. What role does Robert play during this time?
5. What does Edna say to Robert when she wakes up? Discuss the meaning here.
6. How might the ghosts and phantom ships of the sea might be connected to Edna and Robert?

Chapter 14

1. What is Léonce's reaction when Edna does not return with the others? What does this show you about their marriage?
2. How does Edna clarify for herself and for Robert how special their relationship has become?
3. What is the meaning of Robert's song?

Chapter 15

1. What reason does Robert give when he decides to leave Grand Isle for Mexico? What is his *real* reason?
2. Why didn't Robert tell Edna himself?
3. What is Edna's reaction to the news that he is leaving?
4. Discuss their conversation. What is left unsaid?
5. Why does Edna begin to cry? What emotions are overcoming her?

Chapter 16

1. Should Edna give Robert up? Is her interest in Robert considered cheating?
2. How does Edna spend much of her time after Robert leaves?
3. What does she say or do that shows the depth of her feelings for Robert and her awareness of a change within herself?
4. "Edna had once told Madame Ratignolle that she would never sacrifice herself for her children, or for anyone...[she says] I would give my life for my children, but I wouldn't give myself." What does she mean by this statement?
5. Why does Adele not understand it?
6. What does she learn from Mademoiselle Reisz about Robert and Victor Lebrun?
7. How are Mademoiselle Reisz and Adèle Ratignolle foils to Edna?

Chapter 17

1. What is the setting? How does this contrast to the previous setting?
2. How is Léonce Pontellier's attitude toward his home similar to his attitude toward his wife?
3. What is the purpose of Edna's Tuesday "at home"? How does this change after she returns from Grand Isle, and how does this fit into the theme of rebellion?
4. Edna says, "you used to think the cook was a treasure." And Leonce responds, "perhaps she was when she first came, but cooks are only human." What is the significance of this passage?
5. What does Edna do after Léonce leaves?
6. "Taking off her wedding ring, flung it upon the carpet...stamped her heel upon it, striving to crush it...her small boot heel did not make an indenture, not a mark upon the little glittering circlet." What is the significance of this passage?

Chapter 18

1. Edna visits the home of Adèle Ratignolle in New Orleans. How is the Ratignolle marriage a contrast to the Pontellier marriage?
2. How does Edna feel about a marriage such as Adèle's?
3. Madame Ratignolle refers to "Life's delirium," leaves Edna pondering its meaning. To what might Adele be referring?

Chapter 19

1. How does Edna spend most of her time in this section of the book?
2. What is Léonce's reaction?
3. How does Edna feel about her painting?
4. Although she is haunted by memories of Grand Isle, how does she manage to "enjoy" her life?

Chapter 20

1. Why does Edna go to the Lebrun home in New Orleans?
2. How is this house described? In what way is this description related to Edna's desire for Robert?
3. Edna meets Robert's brother, Victor. How is Victor a kind of exaggeration of Robert?
4. What is Victor's comment about Edna at the end of the chapter? Is this true?

Chapter 21

1. Describe the apartment of Mademoiselle Reisz. How is it fitting for her character?
2. What is the content of a letter Robert has written to Mademoiselle Reisz?
3. When Edna shares her desire to be an artist, Mlle Reisz says she must be "Courageous, ma foi! The brave soul. The soul that dares and defies." What is meant by this statement?
4. "The shadows deepened in the little room. The music grew strange and fantastic—turbulent, insistent, plaintive and soft with entreaty. The shadows grew deeper. The music filled the room." What are the shadows and music referencing besides themselves...what is happening?
5. "Come whenever you feel like it. Be careful; the stairs and landings are dark; don't stumble." How might this be interpreted?

Chapter 22

1. How do the actions and comments of Léonce and Doctor Mandélet illustrate the following theme: that men cannot understand women? Cite specific references to the text to support your answer.
2. What is the doctor's advice? What does the doctor not say?

Chapter 23

1. What do Edna and her father share as a common interest?
2. How does Adèle treat Edna's father? What is Edna's reaction?
3. What does Adele Ratignolle see as the problem with the Pontelliers? How does Edna respond?
4. What observations does Doctor Mandelet make when he comes to the Pontellier home to meet Edna's father and to observe her?
5. Describe the story Dr. Mandelet tells at dinner. What is Edna's tale about? What is the symbolic value of this?
6. What is the doctor's reaction to the evening and to Edna's story? How is this an example of foreshadowing?

Chapter 24

1. What is Edna's attitude toward her sister's wedding? How do her father and Léonce react to this?
2. What advice does Edna's father give to Leonce?
3. What is different about Edna's attitude toward Léonce both before and after he leaves for the wedding?
4. Where are the children?
5. How does she feel about being alone?
6. What book does she read in the library? Which essay do you think she may be reading?

Chapter 25

1. What does Edna do when the weather is bad?
2. Who is Alcée Arobin?

3. What does Edna do that is uncommon for women her age? How does she do?
4. What entices Alcee Arobin to Edna, do you think? Why does she like his company?
5. Describe the situation when Arobin shows Edna the scar on his hand. Why does she react this way?
6. “He cast one appealing glance at her, to which she made no response. Alcee Arobin’s manner was so genuine that it often deceived even himself.” What is meant by this passage?
7. Who does Edna think of after Arobin is gone? Does this surprise us?
8. What language is used to tell us that Edna is attracted to Arobin?
9. How would readers in the time period of the novel react to this language?

Chapter 26

1. As their meetings continue, in what way does Edna allow Alcée to speak to her?
2. What draws Edna to Mademoiselle Reisz?
3. What decision has Edna made? Why does she decide this?
4. What does Edna decide to do before leaving? Do you agree with this decision?
5. How does she plan to manage on her own?
6. What 2 details are revealed upon reading the latest letter from Robert?
7. What comment does Mademoiselle Reisz make about Robert, and how does Edna react?
8. What does Edna do for her children and for her husband?
9. What has Edna not taken into consideration?

Chapter 27

1. How does Edna view herself as a woman?
2. Why does Mlle. Reisz feel Edna's shoulder blades? What is the symbolic value of this?
3. What happens in the developing relationship between Edna and Alcée?

Chapter 28

1. What happened between them? Why is this only implied?
2. How does Chopin present the consummation of Edna and Alcée's relationship? After the passionate kiss with Alcée, what does Edna realize about herself?

Chapter 29

1. What does Edna do in order to carry out her plan to leave Léonce? How does this illustrate the theme of independence?
2. When Alcée visits her that afternoon, how did he expect to find her?
3. How is Edna very much in command of the situation?
4. What is a coup d'état? Is this a fitting description?
5. Why is Arobin disappointed at the end of the chapter?

Chapter 30

1. Who are the guests who attend the dinner?
2. List the guests who do not appear and the reason they do not attend.
3. Describe the setting for the dinner, the table, the furnishings, and the overall atmosphere. What does this tell the reader about Edna's decision to leave?
4. How is Edna dressed, and how does she look?

5. How does Edna feel during the evening?
6. How is Victor dressed, and how does he act during the dinner? What does he sing?

Chapter 31

1. What are Edna's dual feelings as she and Alcée clean up after everyone leaves?
2. What is the pigeon house? In what way is it different from Léonce's house?
3. How does Edna feel when she enters the pigeon house with Alcée?
4. In what ways has Alcée invaded Edna's personal space?

Chapter 32

1. What incidents show Léonce's concern with appearances? What steps does he take to avoid scandal?
2. Does Léonce seem concerned to discover why Edna is leaving? Why?
3. How does Edna feel in her new home?
4. How does Edna react to her visit with her children?
5. What is her feeling when she returns to the pigeon house?

Chapter 33

1. What request does Adèle make of Edna?
2. What warning does Adèle give to Edna when she visits her at the pigeon house? What is Edna's attitude?
3. Why is Edna upset when she sees Robert at Mademoiselle Reisz's apartment?
4. How does Robert act during this meeting?

5. What excuse does he give for not writing to Edna during his absence? Why do you think he says this?
6. How does Edna's expectations not match up to reality here?
7. Later, during dinner at the pigeon house, whose picture upsets Robert? Why is this?
8. What does Robert say when questions about his work in Mexico? Why is this not satisfactory to Edna?

Chapter 34

1. How do Edna and Robert act during dinner? What do they say about Grand Isle?
2. How does Robert's tobacco pouch add to the tension?
3. How does Alcée Arobin act when he drops by the cottage to give Edna a message from Mrs. Merriman?
4. What is Robert's reaction?
5. Why does Robert mention Mr. Pontellier before he leaves?
6. How do Edna and Alcée act after he leaves?
7. What verbal exchange takes place before Alcée leaves?
8. After Alcée leaves, what are her thoughts about her reunion with Robert?

Chapter 35

1. How does Edna feel the next morning?
2. What three letters does Edna receive that morning?
3. What happens in Edna's relationships with Robert and Alcée?
4. Why does Chopin include the fact that Arobin left late that night?

5. How does Edna now feel in the morning and at night? Discuss.

Chapter 36

1. How is the garden in the suburbs used as a symbol in this chapter?
2. During her encounter with Robert, what does Edna realize is true about his feelings for her? Why do you think this presents a problem for him?
3. Who kisses whom first? Is this unusual considering the time period?
4. In what way is the new Edna much more liberated than Robert?
5. What do they say to each other? Why is Mr. Pontellier mentioned?
6. Why must Edna leave? Should she?

Chapter 37

1. How does Adèle prepare for the birth of her child?
2. How does Edna feel and what does she remember from the birth of her own children?
3. What warning does Adèle try to give Edna after she delivers? What could be the meaning of this?

Chapter 38

1. What effect does witnessing the birth have on Edna?
2. What conversation do Edna and Dr. Mandelet have when he walks her home?
3. What does Edna say about dreams and sleep, and “being a dupe to illusions all one’s life”?
4. What does Edna continue to think about?
5. What does she find when she returns home? What do you think Robert means?

6. How does Edna spend the rest of the evening?

Chapter 39

1. How is the setting for this last chapter appropriate?
2. What is the subject of conversation between Victor and Mariequita?
3. How would you describe Edna's demeanor at this time?
4. What does she give them as the reason for her visit?
5. What does she say she intends to do before dinner? What is their response to this?
6. The reader learns what Edna thought during that last sleepless night following her return from Adèle's. What realization does she come to about herself, Léonce, her children, and Robert?
7. How is the bird with the broken wing symbolic here?
8. How is Edna's removal of her clothes as she walks down to the beach symbolic?
9. What descriptions of the sea are being repeated here? Why does Chopin do this?
10. Edna swims out too far, experiences one moment of terror, and then relaxes into the ocean. What thoughts does Edna have now?
11. What choice has Edna made? Do you agree or disagree with her decision?
12. Does Edna have any other choice, given her nature and the conventions of society at this time?
13. Does she "think of the children"? Explain.
14. What other choices would Edna have today that didn't exist during the time in which the novel was written?