**Name: Group:**

**The Yellow Wallpaper Context**

**Mark up the text showing confusion, moments of confirmation, and surprise. Include your comments in the margin.**

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was best known in her time as a crusading journalist and feminist intellectual, a follower of such pioneering women’s rights advocates as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, Gilman’s great-aunt. Gilman was concerned with political inequality and social justice in general, but the primary focus of her writing was the unequal status of women within the institution of marriage. In such works as *Concerning Children*(1900), *The Home* (1904), and *Human Work* (1904), Gilman argued that women’s obligation to remain in the domestic sphere robbed them of the expression of their full powers of creativity and intelligence, while simultaneously robbing society of women whose abilities suited them for professional and public life. An essential part of her analysis was that the traditional power structure of the family made *no one* happy—not the woman who was made into an unpaid servant, not the husband who was made into a master, and not the children who were subject to both. Her most ambitious work, *Women and Economics* (1898), analyzed the hidden value of women’s labor within the capitalist economy and argued, as Gilman did throughout her works, that financial independence for women could only benefit society as a whole.

Today, Gilman is primarily known for one remarkable story, “The Yellow Wallpaper,” which was considered almost unprintably shocking in its time and which unnerves readers to this day. This short work of fiction, which deals with an unequal marriage and a woman destroyed by her unfulfilled desire for self-expression, deals with the same concerns and ideas as Gilman’s nonfiction but in a much more personal mode. Indeed, “The Yellow Wallpaper” draws heavily on a particularly painful episode in Gilman’s own life.

In 1886, early in her first marriage and not long after the birth of her daughter, Charlotte Perkins Stetson (as she was then known) was stricken with a severe case of depression. In her 1935 autobiography, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, she describes her “utter prostration” by“unbearable inner misery” and “ceaseless tears,” a condition only made worse by the presence of her husband and her baby. She was referred to Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, then the country’s leading specialist in nervous disorders, whose treatment in such cases was a “rest cure” of forced inactivity. Especially in the case of his female patients, Mitchell believed that depression was brought on by too much mental activity and not enough attention to domestic affairs. For Gilman, this course of treatment was a disaster. Prevented from working, she soon had a nervous breakdown. At her worst, she was reduced to crawling into closets and under beds, clutching a rag doll.

Once she abandoned Mitchell’s rest cure, Gilman’s condition improved, though she claimed to feel the effects of the ordeal for the rest of her life. Leaving behind her husband and child, a scandalous decision, Charlotte Perkins Stetson (she took the name Gilman after a second marriage, to her cousin) embarked on a successful career as a journalist, lecturer, and publisher. She wrote “The Yellow Wallpaper” soon after her move to California, and in it she uses her personal experience to create a tale that is both a chilling description of one woman’s fall into madness and a potent symbolic narrative of the fate of creative women stifled by a paternalistic culture.

In purely literary terms, “The Yellow Wallpaper” looks back to the tradition of the psychological horror tale as practiced by Edgar Allan Poe. For example, Poe’s“The Tell-Tale Heart” is also told from the point of view of an insane narrator. Going further back, Gilman also draws on the tradition of the Gothic romances of the late eighteenth century, which often featured spooky old mansions and young heroines determined to uncover their secrets. Gilman’s story is also forward-looking, however, and her moment-by-moment reporting of the narrator’s thoughts is clearly a move in the direction of the sort of stream-of-consciousness narration used by such twentieth-century writers as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and William Faulkner.

**Find the theme:**

**Three apparent themes in *The Yellow Wallpaper* are the subordination of women in marriage, the importance of self expression, and the evils of the resting cure.**

**Choose a theme: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Cite four quotes using MLA format that prove your theme to be true. “\_\_\_\_\_\_” (). Remember, for the first quote include Perkins Gilman. Make sure to include quotes that involve higher order thinking as well that are symbolic or ironic.**

**1.**

**2.**

**3.**

**4.**

**In your group, discuss the meaning behind your quotes.**

**In your groups, create an argument for the following question: was she crazy before arriving at the house or did being at the house make her crazy? Discussion involves people talking, listening, and politely disagreeing, but your opinion means nothing unless it is backed up by the text. Include two quotations from either text in your argument that support your opinion.**

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