

MFAH Book Club

The Awakening

By Kate Chopin

Spring 2010 MFAH Book Club Selection

Discussion Questions

(written and adapted from various sources)

1. Discuss the title of the book. What does *The Awakening* mean?
2. Discuss Edna's marriage to Léonce. Why did she marry him? What is he like as a husband?
3. How are mothers and artists portrayed in the novel? How would you describe Edna as a mother? As an artist?
4. Background characters, such as the young lovers and lady in black at the shore, appear at the same points in the novel. Why are they significant?
5. What role does the sea play in *The Awakening*? Why might Chopin have chosen to begin the novel at the Louisiana coast and then move the action into the city of New Orleans?
6. What is the meaning of Edna's first successful attempt to swim in the ocean?
7. How do the flashbacks to Edna's past function throughout the novel? How does her father compare to the other men in her life?
8. Why does Edna get involved with Alcée Arobin?
9. When this novel was originally published, it outraged critics and readers. It was accused of committing "unutterable crimes against polite society." One critic stated that it should be labeled "poison." Why did it cause such a stir? Even readers today have mixed views about Edna – She has been described as everything from sensual to sexually repressed, selfish to stifled. What makes her such a complex character?
10. Discuss the various images of birds that appear throughout the novel. How do the various species of birds mentioned—parrots, mockingbirds, pigeons—convey different ideas?
11. Throughout the novel, Edna feels caught between the way others see her and the way she sees herself. Discuss parts of the novel in which this struggle is apparent. How does Edna's awareness to these contradicting views grow?
12. Do you find any of the characters in the novel likeable? Why or why not?

13. What is your reaction to the end of the novel? What were the reasons for Edna's final action?

If you liked this book, you might also like:

Madame Bovary (1856) – Gustave Flaubert
The Yellow Wallpaper (1892) – Charlotte Perkins Gilman
A Doll's House (1879) – Henrik Ibsen
Diary of a Mad Housewife (1967/2005) – Sue Kaufman
The Ultraviolet Sky (1988) – Alma Luz Villanueva
Loving Frank (2007) – Nancy Horan