



POETRY AND PROSE TEXTS AND IMAGINATIVE WRITING

In section A of your exam you will need to be able to meet these assessment objectives:

A01

Read and understand a variety of texts, selecting and interpreting information, ideas and perspectives

A02

Understand and analyse how writers use linguistic and structural devices to achieve their effects

This chapter focuses on Paper 2: Poetry and Prose Texts and Imaginative Writing of the English Language A course. Working through these lessons and activities will help you develop the reading and writing skills you will need for the Paper 2 exam.

The chapter is split into the following sections:

- Fiction texts
- Text anthology: poetry and prose texts
- Imaginative writing

Paper 2 is worth 40% of the total marks for the course and is split into two sections:

- Section A: Poetry and prose texts
- Section B: Imaginative writing

In section B of your exam you will need to be able to meet these assessment objectives:

A04

Communicate effectively and imaginatively, adapting form, tone and register of writing for specific purposes and audiences

A05

Write clearly, using a range of vocabulary and sentence structures, with appropriate paragraphing and accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation

In Paper 2 the assessment objectives are worth following amounts:

- A01 – 8%
- A02 – 12%
- A04 – 12%
- A05 – 8%

STORY OF AN HOUR

KATE CHOPIN

BACKGROUND

Katherine O’Flaherty, known by her married name Chopin, was an American author of short stories and novels. She is best known for her collection of short stories *The Awakening*, published in 1899. *Story of the Hour* was first published in *Vogue* in 1894 and is one of her most popular stories. It tells the story of a woman’s reaction to being told that her husband has died in an accident.



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Context: Women in the 19th century

The roles of men and women were very traditional in the 19th century and this was a common theme in 19th century writing. Chopin’s stories were daring rather than traditional and often portrayed women as trapped and unhappy in their marriages. She was criticised as a result and her books were even banned from libraries. She is now known as an important early feminist writer and admired for her honest depictions of women’s lives.

BEFORE YOU START READING

- 1 Feminism means supporting women’s rights and the equality of the sexes. You can find out more about the history of feminism (sometimes known as the suffrage movement) from reference books or on the Internet. You might like to research the following questions:
 - What law gave women rights over their own earnings and property for the first time?
 - When were women first allowed to graduate from Oxford University?
 - When were women first allowed to vote in parliamentary elections?
- 2 Kate Chopin’s short stories are widely available online and in print. You could read more of her short stories, such as *Reflections*, *Desiree’s Baby* or *The Storm*, which will help you to understand her attitudes towards being a woman in the 19th century. You might like to explore some short stories written by other female authors of the time: Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Turned* (1911) presents similarly unconventional female characters for the period.
- 3 *Five Stories of an Hour* presents five dramatisations for a total of 26 minutes, each keeping the brevity of the story, but reading between the lines in different ways. You might like to watch this online and to compare these interpretations with one other and with your own reading of the story and the characters.

Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband’s death.

It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half concealing. Her husband’s friend Richards was there, too, near her. It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard’s name leading the list of ‘killed.’ He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message.

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister’s arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.



There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul.

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.

There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.

She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams.

She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought.

There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air.

Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will --as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been. When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under her breath: 'free, free, free!' The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.

She did not stop to ask if it were or were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial. She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.

There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination.

And yet she had loved him--sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!

'Free! Body and soul free!' she kept whispering.



Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission. 'Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door-- you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven's sake open the door.'

'Go away. I am not making myself ill.' No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window.

Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long.

She arose at length and opened the door to her sister's importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister's waist, and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom.

Some one was opening the front door with a latchkey. It was Brently Mallard who entered, a little travel-stained, composedly carrying his grip-sack and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of the accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed at Josephine's piercing cry; at Richards' quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife.

But Richards was too late.

When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease --of the joy that kills.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Story of an Hour is about a wife, Mrs Mallard, who has a heart condition which means that she should not become over-excited. She is told, and briefly believes, that her husband has been killed in a train accident. The story documents the mix of the intense emotions, confusion and sense of freedom she feels upon hearing this news.

GENERAL VOCABULARY

epiphany a moment of sudden and great revelation or realization

The story describes the **epiphany** that Mrs Mallard experiences as she contemplates her husband's 'death'. She comes to the realisation that, although she sometimes loved her husband, that she is free and happier without him. She looks forward to her future, rather than dreading it as she had before.

We learn that her name is Louise: she has her own identity and is known by her real, rather than married, name because she is free. She opens the door to her sister Josephine with a sparkle in her eye and a new sense of self. They descend the staircase together. Someone opens the door. It is her husband, Brently Mallard, unharmed and completely composed, unaware of the transformation that has occurred with his absence. We hear a scream from Josephine and see the attempt to conceal the living dead from the view of the heart patient. But it is too late. She is dead. Mrs. Mallard's heart stopped. Her life stopped. She had everything and nothing all in the same moment.

EXPLORING LANGUAGE

Mrs Mallard's appearance, status and feelings are described in detail over the course of the story. Copy and complete the table, considering her thoughts and picking out evidence to support you. A number of descriptions that you might like to consider are highlighted in red in the extract.

▼ DESCRIPTION	▼ WHAT IT TELLS US ABOUT MRS MALLARD
Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death.	
'she was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression.'	
	She feels trapped and stifled by her marriage.
	She feels freed by her husband's death.

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

When reading texts like this, it is important to consider the way in which the author has used narrative devices to create meaning. Look at the table of devices and definitions. Can you come up with an example from the text for each?

▼ NARRATIVE DEVICE	▼ DEFINITION	▼ EXAMPLE	▼ EXPLANATION
Pathetic fallacy	Attributing human emotion to nature	'delicious breath of rain'	The language here shows the happiness she feels at being free. The description of sky shows patches of blue between white clouds; birds are singing and the air is fresh and fertile.
Oxymoron	A contradiction in terms	'a monstrous joy'	This demonstrates the conflict of emotions felt and emphasises the extent to which the actual emotion (joy) diverges from the expected and 'appropriate' emotion, sorrow.
List of three	A rhetorical device used to emphasise an idea	'free free free'	The triadic repetition emphasises the shock and joy felt at suddenly being free.
Symbolism	The use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities:	'she was drinking in the very elixir of life through that open window'	The open window represents the liberation and freedom Mrs Mallard feels from her stifling and repressive marriage.
Irony	A gap between real and implied meaning		We know that she had a weak heart and the doctors assume that she died at his sight from the 'joy' of seeing him. The reader understands that she dies of the sudden joy of realising that she is free from her marriage. 'The joy that kills' describes Louise's stifling and suffocating marriage as well.