

## Unit 5

Title: The Yellow Wallpaper

Suggested Time: 3 days (90 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RL.11.1, RL.11.2, RL.11.4; W.11.1, W.11.4, W.11.9; SL.11.1; L.11.1, L.11.2, L.11.5, L.11.6

### Teacher Instructions

#### **Preparing for Teaching**

1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis. Please do **not** read this to the students. This is a description for teachers about the big ideas and key understanding that students should take away **after** completing this task.

#### Big Ideas and Key Understandings

A significant part of our society is marginalized because of gender and/or mental illness.

#### Synopsis

*The Yellow Wallpaper* is a story told from the perspective of a woman facing the tribulations of mental illness. She is moved to the country by her husband for a “fresh-air cure” which not only fails, but worsens her condition. Not long after her placement in a room resembling a child’s nursery does she begin to lose her mind. The narrator tells the reader, through journaling, of a mysterious wallpaper which seeks to entrap her. The wallpaper’s consuming qualities quickly reveal the narrator’s obsession with breaking free of its hold. It is only through her revelations about the other woman trapped behind the paper and their quest for freedom, that the reader discovers there is much more to her illness than a simple obsession

with wallpaper. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman takes a harrowing walk across the landscape of society and it’s marginalization of people based on mental illness or gender. Upon reflection thirteen years after writing the piece, Gilman commented, “I cast the advice to the winds...and went to the normal life of every human being...joy and growth and service. This was not intended to drive people from being driven crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy, and it worked.”

2. Read the entire selection, keeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings.
3. Re-read the text while noting the stopping points for the Text Dependent Questions and teaching Tier II/academic vocabulary.

**During Teaching**

1. During reading: teacher reads the entire text aloud--fluent readers may help with reading, or recording may be played.
2. Students read the entire selection independently.
3. Students and teacher re-read the text while stopping to respond to and discuss the questions, continually returning to the text.  
A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (i.e., whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.)

Text Dependent Questions

Text-dependent Questions	Evidence-based Answers
At first glance, the narrator describes her husband as careful and loving. Aside from this, is there another perspective? Page 766-768	<i>Various possible answers and evidence.</i> 766- “John laughs at me of course, but one expects that in marriage” The narrator is used to being treated as a child and it is socially acceptable. 768- John is very condescending towards his wife. He denies her the very thing she thinks will make herself well; write and have the company of her friends, “But John says the very worst

	<p>thing I can do is think about my condition..."</p>
<p>How does her husband feel about her illness? What other indications do we get from the text about how others/society in the text feel about her illness? Based on her husband's beliefs about her illness, is the narrator trustworthy? Do you believe her? Cite evidence from the text. Page 766</p>	<p>Her husband feels her illness, is not really an illness, "You see he does not believe I am sick!." He believes that she is suffering from anxiety and a little depression, "If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency—what is one to do?" Her brother, also a doctor, agrees with her husband, "My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing" (766).</p> <p>If all the men in her life feel that her condition is something she can control and she is just being hysterical, it leaves the reader questioning what is really going on with the narrator. Because the narrator is described as having nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency, the reader may decide that she is not trustworthy. This is a good question to ask students throughout the text to see what they think as they read more about the narrator.</p>
<p>Analyze whether her husband's prognosis of "Temporary nervous depression with a slight hysterical tendency" is an accurate assessment of the narrator's mental health. Why does her husband disagree with the narrator's belief that she is sick? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer. Page 766-768</p>	<p>He thinks it is a woman's illness and not a true sickness. The husband feels the diagnosis is accurate. The narrator's brother, who is also a doctor, agrees with the diagnosis. He threatens the narrator regarding her condition, "...If I don't pick up faster he shall take me to Weir Mitchell in the fall...I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is like John and my brother, only more so! (772)" All the male doctors have come to the same conclusion about a woman with this condition, and so the husband disregards the narrator's diagnosis.</p>
<p>Authors often use syntax and diction as a way of creating tone. Find two examples of sentence structure [syntax] and/or</p>	<p><i>Answers will vary:</i> 768—"I did write for a while in spite of them; but it does exhaust</p>

<p>diction [word choice] which demonstrate the change of tone in the text. Explain how these choices affect the author’s tone.</p>	<p>me a good deal—having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition” The narrator uses the words spite and sly to show that she is frustrated with her situation and believes she has to be sly to get well.</p> <p>770- “There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down.” Here the writer uses the word recurrent to show that the narrator is beginning to see things repeatedly in the patterns of the wall paper. Using the description of the pattern as a broken neck that lolls, and bulbous eyes gives the reader an idea that the narrator is becoming obsessed with the wallpaper by describing the images that it makes her imagine.</p> <p>774- “...I’ve caught him several times looking at the paper! And Jennie too. I caught Jennie with her hand on it once.” These lines show the shift in tone from obsession with the wallpaper, to almost dangerous or possessive about the secrets of the wallpaper. The sentence structure becomes simpler and the word choices show more urgency.</p> <p>775- “Life is very much more exciting now than it used to be...” The tone moves from urgent and dangerous to a feeling of excitement about discovering the secret of the wallpaper, but there is still an undercurrent of danger when she says, “I turned it off with a laugh. I had no intention of telling him it was because of the wallpaper—“</p>
<p>How does the setting of the nursery reveal her husband’s attitude towards her illness? Pg. 768</p>	<p>Her husband tells her they came to country for her health and he caters to and plans every hour of her day. She does not like the nursery, but “John would not hear of” moving to another room. The nursery is described as a large airy room that used to be a nursery, and then a play room and gymnasium. “The windows are barred for little children.” The setting implies that the narrator is a child who does not know how to properly care</p>

	for herself.
What does the author mean by “sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin” when talking about the wallpaper? Page 768	She means it is not a relaxing pattern with beautiful colors; it is a pattern that is so atrocious that it makes it difficult for her to look at without being agitated.
On page 768, the author writes, “It is dull enough to confuse the eye in the following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions”. What does the language in this quote reveal about the narrator’s deteriorating state? Page 768	As the narrator becomes more obsessed with the wallpaper, she becomes more descriptive and uses long, erratic sentence to describe the paper. The word choice also begins to reveal where her obsession with the wallpaper appears to be taking her mind/thoughts.
Trace the change in her language--throughout the text, the narrators grows more agitated, and then suddenly shifts—cite words and lines that reveal this language throughout the text. What is the significance of this shift?	<p><i>Very similar answers to question 3, but an important aspect for students to follow the narrator’s descent into mental illness.</i></p> <p>768 “I did write for a while in spite of them; but it does exhaust me a good deal—having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition” The narrator uses the words spite and sly to show that she is frustrated with her situation and believes she has to be sly to get well.</p> <p>770 “There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down.” Here the writer uses the word recurrent to show that the narrator is beginning to see things repeatedly in the patterns of the wall paper. Using the description of the pattern as a broken neck that lolls, and bulbous eyes gives the reader an idea that the narrator is becoming obsessed with the wallpaper by describing the images that it makes her imagine.</p> <p>774- “...I’ve caught him several times looking at the paper! And</p>

	<p>Jennie too. I caught Jennie with her hand on it once.” These lines show the shift in tone from obsession with the wallpaper, to almost dangerous or possessive about the secrets of the wallpaper. The sentence structure becomes simpler and the word choices show more urgency.</p> <p>775- “Life is very much more exciting now than it used to be...” The tone moves from urgent and dangerous to a feeling of excitement about discovering the secret of the wallpaper, but there is still an undercurrent of danger when she says, “I turned it off with a laugh. I had no intention of telling him it was because of the wallpaper—“</p> <p>All of these shifts in tone and language indicate the growing illness that the narrator is suffering from. The more she delves into the wallpaper, the deeper her obsession and the more out of touch with reality she becomes. The language moves from simple to extremely agitated and suspicious—a clear indication of the narrator’s descent into madness.</p>
<p>On page 769, how does the narrator reveal her bitterness towards John?</p>	<p>The narrator makes comments about how she feels, but then she always corrects herself by what John feels. In the following line, we see her bitterness towards John’s belief that she is not sick and it is all in her mind, “John does not know how much I really suffer. He knows there is no reason to suffer, and that satisfies him.”</p>
<p>In the following lines, the narrator describes the wallpaper using an allusion to the bible: “The wallpaper, as I said before, is torn off in spots, and it sticketh closer than a brother—they must have had perseverance as well as hatred” This quote alludes to the biblical Proverbs 18:24, “There are friends who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother.” What could this line represent in the story? Who or</p>	<p><i>Various answers—good quote for students to analyze and discuss what it might mean, using the textual evidence.</i></p> <p>The narrator is implying that the wallpaper is closer to her and “Sticks closer than a brother.” Her husband and family may be doing many things for her own good, but what her family is doing for her is leading her closer to ruin.</p> <p>Another interpretation could be that she is being compared to</p>

<p>what sticketh closer than a brother? Cite evidence from the text to prove your ideas. Page 770</p>	<p>a child (again), and she is the one who has both the hatred and perseverance to tear off the wallpaper.</p>
<p>The narrator yearns to write and to have company, but she believes that, "He would as soon put fireworks in my pillow as to let me have those stimulating people about now." How does this image show John's attitude towards the narrator's attempts towards normalcy? Pg. 769</p>	<p>He believes that complete isolation, bed rest, and absolutely no working or writing is what is needed for his wife to get over her hysteria. He does not believe that she is sick, but just a bit depressed. His attitude is that she is a little child that does not know how to take care of herself.</p>
<p>On page 770, the narrator describes an area on the wallpaper: "There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down. I get positively angry with the impertinence of it and the everlastingness. Up and down and sideways they crawl, and those absurd, unblinking eyes are everywhere." What is going on in these lines? What is the narrator referring to? Describe the effect the wallpaper has on the narrator? Page 770</p>	<p>The narrator is beginning to see things repeatedly in the patterns of the wall paper. Using the description of the pattern as a broken neck that lolls, and bulbous eyes gives the reader an idea that the narrator is becoming obsessed with the wallpaper by describing the images that it makes her imagine. It also shows that the wallpaper agitates the narrator and draws her into the paper, as if drawing her deeper into her mental illness.</p> <p>The narrator is beginning to see things in the paper. Instead of just being atrocious paper, she is beginning to see things in the paper and her imagination is causing her to begin losing control of her thoughts.</p>
<p>How is the narrator referred to throughout the novel? What does that reveal? Various pages.</p>	<p>Her husband use words and phrases that one would use with a child: "blessed little goose" pg. 769, "He said I was his little darling" pg. 772, "Little girl" pg. 773, "Bless her little heart" pg.773</p> <p>Her husband does not think she can take care of herself, and so he feels he needs to impose this "cure" on her, but it appears to just make her more mentally unstable.</p>
<p>How does the narrator's illness free her? Cite evidence from the text to prove your interpretations. Page 776-778</p>	<p>She is freed by her illness by becoming the woman in the wallpaper, " I always lock the door when I creep by daylight". She sets herself free by tearing the wallpaper down and giving in to her illness. "I wonder if they all came out of the wallpaper</p>

	<p>as I did?”</p> <p>She is able to freely creep around the house and around the room, “...here I can creep freely on the floor, and my shoulder just fits in that long smooch around the wall, so I cannot lose my way.” The wallpaper allows her to be freed and actually keeps her from “losing her way.”</p>
What is the irony in the last passage of the story? Page 778	<p>The irony is that John becomes part of the wallpaper as the narrator crawls over the top of him—he has become the wallpaper she has destroyed; “Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!”</p>



Tier II/Academic Vocabulary

	<p><b>These words require less time to learn</b>                      (They are concrete or describe an object/event/                      process/characteristic that is familiar to students)</p>	<p><b>These words require more time to learn</b>                      (They are abstract, have multiple meanings, are a part                      of a word family, or are likely to appear again in future texts)</p>
<p><b>Meaning can be learned from context</b></p>	<p>Page [766] - [hereditary]                      Page [766] - [queer]                      Page [766] - [scoffs]                      Page [766] - [hysterical]                      Page [769] - [repellent]                      Page [769] - [bedstead]                      Page [769] - [burden]                      Page [769] - [barred]</p>	<p>Page [766] - [felicity]                      Page [768] - [lame]                      Page [768] - [contradictions]                      Page [769] - [lurid]                      Page [769] - [whitewashed]</p>
<p><b>Meaning needs to be provided</b></p>	<p>Page [768] - [draught]                      Page [768] - [chintz]</p>	<p>Page [766] - [ancestral]                      Page [766] - [untenanted]                      Page [769] - [atrocious]                      Page [768] - [Arbors]                      Page [768] - [ghostliness]</p>

## Culminating Writing Task

- *“Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over. Then in the very bright spot she keeps still, and in the very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard. (pg. 775) What do both the wallpaper and the women represent in this passage? Explain what the narrator means by these lines, then connect your interpretation to the idea of marginalization. Compose an argument that is one page in length. Support your claims with valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence from the text, including direct quotes and page numbers.*
- Teacher Instructions
  1. Students identify their writing task from the prompt provided. Full class discussion will help the teacher know whether or not every student understands what they are expected to do.
  2. Students complete an evidence chart as a pre-writing activity. Teachers should remind students to use any relevant notes they compiled while reading and answering the text-dependent questions.

<b><i>Evidence Quote or paraphrase</i></b>	<b><i>Page number</i></b>	<b><i>Elaboration / explanation of how this evidence supports ideas or argument</i></b>
“...And she is all the time trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through that pattern—it strangles so; I think that is why it has so many heads.”	775	I think this shows that the woman in the wallpaper (all women) is always trying to get out of their marginalized position of weak and subservient to men and only needed for domestic purposes. It also shows that the stereotypes are so ingrained that all women struggle to break free from the restraints imposed on them by society.
“Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over.	775	This line shows a combination of things. The line is about every woman, at some time or another, and it shows how far the narrator has gone into her illness.
Then in the very bright spot she keeps still, and in the very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and	775	The lines show the women trying to break free of their jails. She takes hold of the bars—like jail cell bars

shakes them hard. (pg. 775)		
Temporary nervous depression with a slight hysterical tendency (766-768)"	766-768	This is what he thinks of her illness—that it's not an illness at all, but her being nervous and slightly hysterical.
"Little girl (773)" and "Blessed little goose (769)	769 & 773	She how he treats her as a child.

3. Once students have completed the evidence chart, they should look back at the writing prompt in order to remind themselves what kind of response they are writing (i.e. expository, analytical, argumentative) and think about the evidence they found. (Depending on the grade level, teachers may want to review students' evidence charts in some way to ensure accuracy.) From here, students should develop a specific thesis statement. This could be done independently, with a partner, small group, or the entire class. Consider directing students to the following sites to learn more about thesis statements: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/> OR [http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/thesis\\_statement.shtml](http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/thesis_statement.shtml).
4. Students compose a rough draft. With regard to grade level and student ability, teachers should decide how much scaffolding they will provide during this process (i.e. modeling, showing example pieces, sharing work as students go).
5. Students complete final draft.

- Sample Answer

In Charlotte Perkins-Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper", the author is making a statement about being a woman and about mental illness during the early part of the 20th Century in America. Perkins-Gilman uses the women trapped behind the wallpaper and the wallpaper itself, as a symbolic statement about how we marginalize significant parts of our society.

In the following passage, we experience what the narrator sees behind the wallpaper at the height of her mental illness:

*"Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over. Then in the very bright spot she keeps still, and in the very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard. (pg. 775)*

The wallpaper represents the bars that keep women and other marginalized people within the boundaries that society expects. The women represent all women who have been oppressed by society's expectations of what they should be and do in their lives. We see this representation in the following lines: "Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over (775)." The narrator is referring to the women hidden behind the wallpaper. Sometimes there is just one woman and sometimes many. Many women and the mentally ill have struggled with some form of oppression imposed by society's expectations, especially during the early 1900s. We see this in the text when the narrator's husband speaks to her and either laughs at her or calls her names one would call a child: "Little girl (773)" and "Blessed little goose (769)." Treating her as if she is a child is one way of marginalizing her and keeping her feeling as though she may not understand and that her husband knows best. He gets her to conform to what he wants and disregards her ideas, thoughts, and beliefs.

Perkins-Gilman shows the plight of the marginalized in the lines, "Then in the very bright spot she keeps still, and in the very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard (775)." These lines allude to the idea of shaking the bars of a prison cell hard, and the anger and frustration of someone behind bars that is unable to escape. In the quote, women struggle to align to society's expectations. Many women, like the narrator trying to be a writer, try to move beyond expectations and become more in life. We also see the narrator in her deepest, darkest moments, as she rebels and tries to break free of society's expectations of her as a housewife who is suffering from, "Temporary nervous depression with a slight hysterical tendency (766-768)".

Although the text reveals the marginalization of women, it also reflects the same oppression and marginalization that is suffered by the mentally ill and other marginalized parts of society. Perkins-Gilman's horrific story of a young woman driven mad by yellow wallpaper is really a statement about the treatment of all women and the mentally ill. The author shows us these abuses by using the wallpaper as a symbolic jail for any marginalized people--women or the mentally ill.

### Additional Tasks

- After reading *The Yellow Wallpaer*, read the short excerpt from “Complaints and Disorders (pg. 782), which refers to the famous Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell mentioned in the story. Summarize Dr. Weir’s ideas about women as patients, and then write an argument that shows the effects that Dr. Weir’s beliefs had on the health of women during this time period.

Answer: Students should be able to summarize Dr. Weir’s “ideal patient” and write an argument about how his ideas about women and a woman’s mind contributed to the severe marginalization of women. Students may point out how his disbelief in women’s illnesses probably led to many more women becoming severely disturbed or severely depressed.

- *What does the wallpaper symbolize?*

Answer: The wallpaper is symbolic of John’s marginalization of her and she has finally broken free of him, “I’ve got out at last, said I, in spite of you and Jane.” By extension, the wallpaper symbolizes society’s marginalization of both the mentally ill and women, and the narrator is the one who is able to peel back the paper and expose this, “And I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back!”

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

*The Yellow Wallpaper*

1. At first glance, the narrator describes her husband as careful and loving. Aside from this, is there another perspective? (Pages 766-768)
2. How does her husband feel about her illness? What other indications do we get from the text about how others/society in the text feel about her illness? Based on her husband's beliefs about her illness, is the narrator trustworthy? Do you believe her? Cite evidence from the text. (Page 766)
3. Analyze whether her husband's prognosis of "Temporary nervous depression with a slight hysterical tendency" is an accurate assessment of the narrator's mental health. Why does her husband disagree with the narrator's belief that she is sick? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer. (Page 766-768) Authors often use syntax and diction as a way of creating tone. Find two examples of sentence structure [syntax] and/or diction [word choice], which demonstrate the change of tone in the text. Explain how these choices affect the author's tone.

4. How does the setting of the nursery reveal her husband's attitude towards her illness? (Pg. 768)
  
5. What does the author mean by "sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin" when talking about the wallpaper? (Page 768)
  
6. On page 768, the author writes, "It is dull enough to confuse the eye in the following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions". What does the language in this quote reveal about the narrator's deteriorating state? (Page 768 )
  
7. Trace the change in her language--throughout the text, the narrators grows more agitated, and then suddenly shifts—cite words and lines that reveal this language throughout the text. What is the significance of this shift?
  
8. On page 769, how does the narrator reveal her bitterness towards John?

9. In the following lines, the narrator describes the wallpaper using an allusion to the bible: “The wallpaper, as I said before, is torn off in spots, and it sticketh closer than a brother— they must have had perseverance as well as hatred” This quote alludes to the biblical Proverbs 18:24, “There are friends who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother.” What could this line represent in the story? Who or what sticketh closer than a brother? Cite evidence from the text to prove your ideas. (Page 770)
10. The narrator yearns to write and to have company, but she believes that, “He would as soon put fireworks in my pillow as to let me have those stimulating people about now.” How does this image show John’s attitude towards the narrator’s attempts towards normalcy? (Pg. 769)
11. On page 770, the narrator describes an area on the wallpaper: “There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down. I get positively angry with the impertinence of it and the everlastingness. Up and down and sideways they crawl, and those absurd, unblinking eyes are everywhere.” What is going on in these lines? What is the narrator referring to? Describe the effect the wallpaper has on the narrator? (Page 770)



12. How is the narrator referred to throughout the novel? What does that reveal? (Various pages.)

13. How does the narrator's illness free her? Cite evidence from the text to prove your interpretations. (Pages 776-778)

14. What is the irony in the last passage of the story? (Page 778)