

study guide for the necklace

Study Guide for The Necklace

"The Necklace," originally titled "La Parure," is a short story by French author Guy de Maupassant, first published in 1884. This classic tale explores themes of wealth, pride, and the often deceptive nature of appearances. The story revolves around Madame Mathilde Loisel, a woman who dreams of a life filled with luxury and glamour. This study guide aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the story, including its plot, themes, characters, and important symbols, while also offering discussion questions to deepen your understanding.

Plot Summary

The narrative follows Mathilde Loisel, who feels she was born for a life of luxury, yet is married to a humble clerk, Monsieur Loisel. Mathilde's discontent with her modest living leads her to fantasize about wealth and social status. When her husband surprises her with an invitation to a prestigious ball, she laments that she has nothing suitable to wear. To appease her, Monsieur Loisel sacrifices his savings to buy her a new dress.

However, Mathilde is still unsatisfied, feeling that she needs jewelry to complete her look. She borrows a stunning diamond necklace from her wealthy friend, Madame Forestier. At the ball, Mathilde is the center of attention, enjoying the life she has always dreamed of. But when the evening ends, she discovers that the borrowed necklace is missing.

In a panic, the Loisels search for it but are unsuccessful. They decide to replace the necklace, which leads them to spend the next ten years in poverty to repay the debt incurred from purchasing a replacement. Eventually, Mathilde encounters Madame Forestier, who reveals that her original necklace was merely a piece of costume jewelry, worth only a fraction of what they had spent.

Themes

Understanding the themes in "The Necklace" can enhance your appreciation of the story's complexities. Here are some key themes:

1. The Dangers of Vanity

Mathilde's obsession with appearances drives the narrative. She believes that beauty and wealth define her worth, leading her to make poor decisions. Her vanity ultimately results in her downfall, as she sacrifices her happiness for a fleeting moment of glamour.

2. The Burden of Materialism

The story critiques the societal pressures that equate success with material possessions. Mathilde's desire for a luxurious lifestyle blinds her to the value of her own life and relationship with her husband. The necklace, a symbol of wealth, becomes the catalyst for her tragic misfortune.

3. The Irony of Fate

Maupassant masterfully employs irony in the story. The twist ending reveals that the necklace Mathilde longed for was not what she believed it to be, underscoring the idea that life often takes unexpected turns. This irony serves as a poignant reminder that our perceptions can be misleading.

4. The Role of Class and Social Status

Social class is a significant theme in "The Necklace." Mathilde's dissatisfaction stems from her desire to transcend her social standing. Maupassant highlights the rigidity of social classes and how they shape individuals' identities, aspirations, and relationships.

Character Analysis

The characters in "The Necklace" are carefully crafted to convey the story's themes and lessons. Here are the primary characters:

1. Madame Mathilde Loisel

- Personality: Mathilde is portrayed as a beautiful woman who feels entitled to a life of luxury and wealth. Her vanity and materialistic desires drive her actions throughout the story.
- Development: Mathilde undergoes a transformation from a dreamer to a woman who faces the harsh realities of life. The ten years of hardship reshape her character, making her more resilient but also more resigned to her fate.

2. Monsieur Loisel

- Personality: Mathilde's husband is kind, supportive, and practical. He represents the opposite of Mathilde's aspirations, content with their modest life.
- Development: Monsieur Loisel's character remains relatively constant, embodying loyalty and selflessness. His sacrifices highlight the disparity between his values and Mathilde's desires.

3. Madame Forestier

- Personality: Madame Forestier is wealthy and generous, embodying the life that Mathilde covets.
- Role in the Story: She serves as a foil to Mathilde, representing the life of privilege that Mathilde yearns for. Her revelation at the end serves as a stark contrast to Mathilde's struggles.

Symbols

Symbols play a crucial role in conveying the story's themes. Here are some significant symbols in "The Necklace":

1. The Necklace

The necklace itself symbolizes wealth and the desire for a luxurious lifestyle. It represents the illusions that Mathilde constructs around her identity and aspirations. The fact that it is a fake piece of jewelry underscores the superficial nature of her pursuits.

2. The Ball

The ball symbolizes the social aspirations that Mathilde holds dear. It is a fleeting moment of joy that ultimately leads to her downfall, illustrating the transient nature of wealth and status.

3. The Poverty of the Loisels

The ten years spent repaying the debt symbolize the consequences of vanity and materialism. The physical and emotional toll of their poverty serves as a stark reminder of the choices Mathilde made in pursuit of an illusory social status.

Discussion Questions

To deepen your understanding of "The Necklace," consider the following discussion questions:

1. What does the story suggest about the relationship between happiness and material possessions?
2. How does Maupassant use irony to enhance the story's themes?
3. In what ways is Mathilde a sympathetic character? Can her actions be justified?
4. What role does gender play in Mathilde's dissatisfaction with her life?
5. How does the story reflect the social dynamics of 19th-century France?

Conclusion

"The Necklace" remains a timeless story that resonates with contemporary readers due to its exploration of vanity, materialism, and the pursuit of happiness. Guy de Maupassant's keen observations about human nature and societal pressures offer valuable lessons about the dangers of superficiality. As you reflect on this story, consider how its themes are still relevant today, prompting us to question our own values and aspirations in a materialistic world. The journey of Mathilde Loisel serves as a cautionary tale about the perils of longing for a life defined by wealth and appearance rather than one grounded in authenticity and contentment.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of 'The Necklace' by Guy de Maupassant?

The main theme of 'The Necklace' is the danger of vanity and the pursuit of wealth, highlighting how materialism can lead to one's downfall.

How does Mathilde Loisel's character develop throughout the story?

Mathilde Loisel transitions from being a discontented, materialistic woman who dreams of a luxurious life to a more resilient and hardworking individual, ultimately learning the harsh realities of life.

What is the significance of the necklace in the story?

The necklace symbolizes wealth and social status, and its loss becomes a catalyst for Mathilde's transformation and the irony of her situation, emphasizing the story's themes of appearance versus reality.

How does the ending of 'The Necklace' serve as an example of irony?

The ending reveals that the necklace Mathilde borrowed was a fake, which is ironic because she sacrifices her entire life to replace it, illustrating the futility of her desire for status.

What role does fate play in 'The Necklace'?

Fate plays a crucial role in 'The Necklace', as the characters' lives are heavily influenced by chance events, leading to Mathilde's tragic outcome despite her aspirations.

What literary devices are prominent in 'The Necklace'?

Prominent literary devices in 'The Necklace' include irony, symbolism, and foreshadowing, which all contribute to the story's moral lesson about the dangers of envy and pride.

What societal issues are addressed in 'The Necklace'?

The story addresses issues of class disparity, gender roles, and the pressure to conform to societal expectations regarding wealth and beauty, which are central to Mathilde's struggles.

[Study Guide For The Necklace](#)

Study Guide For The Necklace

Related Articles

- [study guide working papers chapters 1 13 to accompany](#)
- [surface anatomy of the foot](#)
- [study guide answer key physical science](#)

[Back to Home](#)