Unit Eight Study Guide

“The Necklace” by Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893)

- Many critics consider de Maupassant the greatest French writer of all time.
- Journalist, army, studied law (didn't finish law school), civil servant like his character in “The Necklace”
- A guiding hand in his early career was another French writer, Gustave Flaubert.
- Family added the “de” to their name in attempt to sound more noble. Can he relate to his character's desire to be more than middle class? 😊

Gustave Flaubert

- 1820-1880
- Maupassant’s grandfather was Flaubert’s godfather.
- realist
- author of Madame Bovary (deals with unhappy love & adultery, showing the “ugly” side of people in the fashion of realistic writers)

Also about de Maupassant . . .

- contracted syphilis which left him mentally ill
- had problems with vision and headaches
- died in an insane asylum a year after trying to take his own life
- some of his work features mental illness/paranoia as a theme. These pieces are often compared to work by Edgar Allen Poe or Steven King.
- Member of the Naturalistic school
(No, the word “school” does not refer to a physical location like a school building. It is a synonym for “philosophy.” In other words, a “school of thought.”)

Characteristics of Naturalism

- like realism, it was a response to romanticism
- influenced by Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution
- stated that social conditions, heredity, environment, wealth, etc, shaped human character in ways that were inevitable/unavoidable
- pessimism/fatalism abound

Questions about Naturalism

- Why were pessimism and fatalism so prevalent among this group?
- How does “The Necklace” meet the criteria of a naturalistic text?

Characteristics of Realism

- depiction of characters as they are in everyday life, not glorified or romanticized
- showed “ugly” sides of people and relationships
Characteristics of Romanticism

- reaction to the Industrial Revolution
- began in the second half of the 18th century
- emphasized emotion, lovers
- created an escape from “modern” life

About “The Necklace”
Maupassant said writing’s goal should not be “telling a story or entertaining us or touching our hearts but ... forcing us to think and understand the deeper, hidden meaning of events.” What do you think the “deeper, hidden meaning of [the] events” in “The Necklace” is?

The necklace may symbolize ... wealth, appearance, shattered dreams, situations where daydreams were better than attaining the object of desire

3rd person omniscient narrator
tone = detached, neutral, objective
mood = alternately depressed, jovial, desperate, exasperated, frustrated

Find examples of Maupassant’s very short sentences with few or no modifiers as well as examples of his longer sentences full of parallel construction. When does Maupassant favor one over the other?

Irony: contrasting what the characters always thought about the situation with what was reality; makes a great twist ending
What are some examples of irony in “The Necklace”?

Fate v. Free Will
Was Mathilde a victim of fate as the first line of the story might suggest (“...born, as if by an accident of fate, into a family of clerks”) or of her own thinking/choices?

Additional Points to Consider
- How does the husband’s attitude toward the reality of his family’s life differ from his wife’s?
- Analyze the dialogue in the short story. What does each piece of dialogue reveal about the speaker?
- Find lines from the story that indicate the husband has a down-to-earth simplicity.
- How did Madame Loisel’s dream become a difficult reality for her husband?
- How did Madame Loisel’s worst fears come true?
- Are Madame Loisel’s actions over the ten years either heroic or admirable? Why or why not?
- Were the Loisels’ efforts to replace the necklace admirable or foolish? Defend.
• What does the necklace represent when Madame Loisel first sees it in its black satin box?
• What does the necklace symbolize after Madame Loisel discovers that it is lost?
• How does the meaning of the symbol change when it is revealed that the diamonds in the necklace were fake?

Robert Frost (1874-1963)
“The Road Not Taken”

• never earned a college degree, though attended several colleges, including Harvard
• teacher, cobbler, editor, farmer
• lived in San Francisco as a young child, then in New England; moved to England (where his career began to take off), returned to New England (New Hampshire)
• Ezra Pound, Imagist poet, helped publish his work while he was in England
• four Pulitzer Prizes
• his own poet; didn’t adhere to one of the contemporary schools of poetry of his day

Frost’s work is known for
1. universal themes
2. paying attention to meter
3. language that was “true to life” rather than overly flowery
4. focus on nature
5. inspired by familiar New England landscapes

Aside from Ezra Pound, Frost was met and befriended several other poets of note:
1. Edward Thomas – one who inspired “The Road Not Taken;” he used to be Frost’s guide in walks through the English countryside and he always said the well worn path was not the way to go (poem intends to tease Thomas about this)
2. Rupert Brooke
3. Robert Graves

“The Road Not Taken”

rhyme scheme: ABAAB; all rhymes but “hence” and “difference” are strict and masculine

two paths in the woods or two roads forking from one = an archetype; they are metaphors for decisions we must make on life’s journey

two paths in the woods = symbols
symbols of ...
1. life choices
2. fate and free will

irony of ending and use of the word “sigh” … speaker knows on the day he’s taking
the walk that years later he’s going to present this moment inaccurately. That
knowledge is what the sigh represents.

theme of remorse … speaker anticipates he’ll always long to know what the other
path held

Questions to Consider
• Is there a “right” path?
• Should you always take the road less traveled by?
• Instead of a “right” and “wrong” path, is there always just the path you took
and the path you didn’t take? Neither right nor wrong; just different?
• Does it matter what path you take, or is the path you think you’re choosing
predetermined? (fate v free will)
• Is the poem about right and wrong decisions or about moments of decision
(the contemplating of before, the wondering/questioning after)?
• What kind of sigh was it? Relief? Regret? Remorse? Back up your opinion
with evidence from the text and include your own point of view as well.

Frank R. Stockton (1834-1902)
“The Lady, or the Tiger?”

• like James Hurst, Stockton is known primarily for one story, though was a
prolific writer and as widely read as Mark Twain
• wood engraver – how illustration were done for magazines. As other means
of illustration were invented, Stockton indulged his childhood writing hobby
and began composing pieces for publication, esp in children’s magazines.
• wrote for St. Nicholas children’s magazine
• “The Lady, or the Tiger?” has inspired poetry by Robert Browning (who
thought it was the tiger), an operetta, a play, a movie, and a recording
• Stockton never divulged which door he felt the man opened.
• Stockton meant the story to be a test of character. The character of the
reader is divulged based on his or her choice. If the reader feels the tiger was
behind the door, that person is likely a pessimist. On the contrary, if the
reader feels the princess guided her former lover to the door with the
woman behind it, the reader is likely an optimist, a romantic.

an ordeal – in England in the Middle Ages, the accused were physically tested to
determine their guilt or innocence

Think about: Love vs. jealousy
Which is the stronger emotion? Which most often motivates our actions? Which do you think motivated the princess? Therefore, what do you think was behind the door?

Is chance truly “impartial and incorruptible?” Defend your answer with details from the story and every day life.

What is the tone of “The Lady, or the Tiger?” Consider the following lines: “It was the duty and privilege of the person on trial, to walk directly to these doors and open one of them.” “This was the king’s semi-barbaric method of administering justice. Its perfect fairness is obvious.”

At what point is the young man’s fate decided? Explain.

How are the two roads in “The Road Not Taken” and the two doors in “The Lady, or the Tiger?” similar? How are they different?

What is an example of a time when it is appropriate for others to make choices for you? In what circumstances is it necessary for you to make the decision of your own accord? What kind of situation did the protagonist in “The Lady, or the Tiger?” face, and did he act accordingly? In other words, do you think it was in his best interest to leave his fate in the princess’s hands? Do you think she was trustworthy?

W.D. Wetherell (b 1948)
“The Bass, the River, and Sheila Mant”

biography
• like Stockton, wanted to be a writer from a young age
• passionate about the outdoors of New England, like Frost
• lost of rejection, lots of jobs
• no computer or tv
• “promotes a simple life spent in tune with nature” in his stories

Be able to . . .
• Connect the theme of decision making across all four pieces in this unit.
• Discuss the theme of reward and sacrifice. Be prepared to write about one piece from unit eight and one piece from another unit; a piece where the sacrifice garnered the reward, and a piece where it did not.
• Given a piece of dialogue, be able to discuss what it reveals about the character. For example, “I was thinking of getting my hair styled, more swept back? I mean, Ann-Margaret? Like hers, only shorter.”
• The narrator concludes “There will be other Sheila Mants in my life, ...”. What did Sheila Mant represent? Go deeper than just a girl who rejects him.
• Be able to produce/discuss examples of **direct and indirect characterization** in the text.
• Elaborate on conflict in the text, specifically **man v. himself, internal conflict**.