

Janet Vong's final draft appears below with annotations that highlight some of its features.

■ **An essay on fiction (no secondary sources)**

Author's name and identification in MLA format (p. 687)

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English 102
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Paper title incorporating author and title of analyzed work

Ironies of Life in Kate Chopin's
"The Story of an Hour"

Introduction naming author/title and stating thesis

Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour"—which takes only a few minutes to read—has an ironic ending: Mrs. Mallard dies just when she is beginning to live. On first reading, the ending seems almost too ironic for belief. On rereading the story, however, one sees that the ending is believable partly because it is consistent with other ironies in the story.

Detailing of story's ironies, using quotations and some summary to emphasize the reversals

Irony appears at the very start of the story. Because Mrs. Mallard's friends and her sister assume, mistakenly, that she was deeply in love with her husband, Brently Mallard, they take great care to tell her gently of his death. They mean well, and in fact they do well, bringing her an hour of life, an hour of joyous freedom, but it is ironic that they think their news is sad. True, Mrs. Mallard at first expresses grief when she hears the news, but soon (unknown to the others) she finds joy. So Richards's "sad message" (23), though sad in Richards's eyes, is in fact a happy message.

Parenthetical citations in MLA style referring to the work cited at the end of the paper (see p. 648)

Among the small but significant ironic details is the statement near the end of the story that when Mallard entered the house, Richards tried to conceal him from Mrs. Mallard, but "Richards was too late" (24). Almost at the start of the story, in the second paragraph, Richards "hastened" (23) to bring his sad news. But if Richards had arrived too late at the start, Brently Mallard would have arrived at home first, and Mrs. Mallard's life would not have ended an hour later but would simply have gone on as it had been. Yet another irony at the end of the story is the diagnosis of the doctors. They say she died of "heart disease—of joy that kills" (24). In one sense they are right: Mrs. Mallard has for the last hour experienced a great joy. But of course the doctors totally misunderstand the joy that kills her. It is not joy at seeing her husband alive, but her realization that the great joy she experienced during the last hour is over.

All of these ironic details add richness to the story, but the central irony resides not in the well-intentioned but ironic actions of Richards, or in the unconsciously ironic words of the doctors, but in Mrs. Mallard's own life. She "sometimes" (24) loved her husband, but in a way

she has been dead, a body subjected to her husband's will. Now, his apparent death brings her new life. Appropriately, this new life comes to her at the season of the year when "the tops of trees . . . were all aquiver with the new spring life" (23). But, ironically, her new life will last only an hour. She is "Free, free, free" (24)—but only until her husband walks through the doorway. She looks forward to "summer days" (24), but she will not see even the end of this spring day. If her years of marriage were ironic, bringing her a sort of living death instead of joy, her new life is ironic, too, not only because it grows out of her moment of grief for her supposedly dead husband, but also because her vision of "a long procession of years" (24) is cut short within an hour on a spring day.

[New page.]

Work Cited

Chopin, Kate. "The Story of an Hour." *An Introduction to Literature: Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*. Ed. Sylvan Barnet, William Burto, and William E. Cain. 13th ed. New York: Longman, 2004. 23-24.

New page for work cited in MLA style (p. 656)

50f Writing about fiction, poetry, and drama

A work of literature falls into a category, or **genre**—fiction, poetry, or drama—depending on how it is structured. The different genres of literature require different approaches in writing.

1 Writing about fiction

The "Questions for a literary analysis" on pages 741–42 will help you think about any work of literature, including a story or novel, and find a topic to write on. The following questions provide additional prompts for thinking about fiction. For an example of writing about fiction, see Janet Vong's essay opposite and above.

Questions for analyzing fiction

- **What happens in the story?** For yourself, summarize the plot (the gist of the happenings). Think about what your summary *leaves out*.
 - **Is the story told in chronological order, or are there flashbacks or flashforwards?** On rereading, what foreshadowing (hints of what is to come) do you detect?
 - **What conflicts does the work include?**
 - **How does the writer develop characters?** Is character revealed by explicit comment or through action? With which character(s) do you
- (continued)*