

The Necklace

Themes

French literature
Realistic fiction

Overview

The Necklace, a short story by 19th Century French writer Guy de Maupassant, is a masterful tale of irony. Mathilde Loisel is married to a decent but minor government official. Though she lives a comfortable bourgeois life, she dreams of wealth and social status. When she and her husband are invited to a high-society ball, Mathilde buys an expensive gown to wear, then persuades a wealthy acquaintance, Madame Forestier, to loan her a diamond necklace to complete her costume. Mathilde is a dazzling success at the ball, but when she returns home, she cannot find the necklace anywhere. It is lost, and with it, all Mathilde's dreams. Mathilde puts in ten years' menial labor in order to replace the necklace. But when she learns after making this sacrifice causes the viewer to ponder the necklace's true worth.

Vocabulary

Ask students to define **irony** in their own words. (**Irony** means incongruity between what might be expected and what actually occurs.) For example:

Many people have pointed out the **irony** of Thomas Jefferson's owning slaves at the same time he wrote so eloquently of liberty in the Declaration of Independence.

Discussion before viewing

1. Ask students what they would do if they had borrowed an expensive item from a friend and accidentally lost it. What if the lender was a person whom the borrower wanted to impress or befriend? Accept various answers; list them on the board in brief form. Encourage the class to generate as many possible responses as possible.
2. Ask students to define value, especially the value of material object, such as a piece of jewelry. What is it that gives an item value? How would they determine the value of an object if they didn't know its value?
3. Just before showing *The Necklace*, set purpose for viewing by asking students to look for the irony in the story of Mathilde.

Questions to ask after viewing

1. Did you see examples of irony in *The Necklace*? Did irony contribute to the overall impact and memorability of the story? Would there have been a story without the irony? Why or why not?
2. If you had been Mathilde, what would you have done when you discovered the necklace was missing?

3. What did Mathilde seem to have learned before Madame Forestier revealed the actual retail value of the necklace?
4. Would you describe the characters' actions as realistic or contrived?
5. Do Albert's actions justify his fate? Could he have altered the outcome?

Additional activities

- Read "The Necklace" and then view the program again. Is the program more or less powerful than the story? Does it include all the key elements of the story? Did you visualize the setting and characters differently than they appeared in the video?
- Read other short stories by de Maupassant, such as "Boule de Suif" ("Ball of Fat"), which some literary critics consider to be his best work. What themes run through his works? What are the strengths and weaknesses of his work as cited by literary critics?
- Rewrite the ending of "The Necklace." Preserve irony while creating an entirely different scenario. Perhaps have Mathilde rocket to the very top of her society in spite of admitting her careless loss. Use imagination!

- **Length**
22Minutes
- **Audience Levels**
Junior High-Senior High
- **Subjective Areas**
Literature
- **Catalog number**
8692

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Discussion Guide

The Necklace

Objectives

- To introduce Guy de Maupassant, a 19th century French writer
- To discuss the motivation of central character Mathilde Loisel
- To consider the true value of material objects, such as jewelry
- To understand the function of irony in literary works

