



▲ Kate Chopin, writing in the late 19th century, was a pioneer of feminist literature.

KEY POINT

Kate Chopin's short stories are notable for their honest portrayal of women's lives in the period.

'THE STORY OF AN HOUR'

KATE CHOPIN

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Katherine O'Flaherty, known by her married name Chopin, was an American author of short stories and novels. She is best known for her collection of short stories, *The Awakening*, published in 1899.

The roles of men and women were very traditionally defined in the 19th century, and this was common in 19th century writing. However, Chopin's stories were daring rather than traditional and often portrayed women as trapped and unhappy in their marriages. As a result, she was criticised and her books were even banned from libraries. She is now known as an important early feminist writer and admired for her honest depictions of women's lives.

'The Story of an Hour' was first published in *Vogue* in 1894 and is one of her most popular stories. It tells the story of a woman's reaction to being told that her husband has died in an accident.

BEFORE YOU START READING

- 1 Feminism means supporting women's rights and the equality of the sexes. You can find out more about the history of feminism from reference books or on the internet. You might like to research the following questions.
 - What law in the UK gave women the right to have their own earnings and property for the first time?
 - When were women first allowed to graduate from Oxford University?
 - When were women first allowed to vote in UK parliamentary elections?
- 2 Kate Chopin's short stories are widely available online and in print. You could read more of her short stories, such as 'Reflections', 'Desiree's Baby' or 'The Storm', which will help you to understand her attitudes towards being a woman in the 19th century. You might like to explore some short stories written by other female authors of the time: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'Turned' (1911) presents similarly unconventional female characters for the period.
- 3 *Five Stories of an Hour* presents five dramatisations of the story; each one keeps the brevity of the story, but reads between the lines in a different way. Watch this online and to compare these interpretations with one other and with your own reading of the story and the characters.

▼ 'THE STORY OF AN HOUR' BY KATE CHOPIN

Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death.

It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half concealing. Her husband's friend Richards was there, too,