

**KEY POINT**

Maupassant's moral world is not simple. The reader is drawn into making judgements but immediately has them challenged by another point of view.

Most readers blame Madame Loisel for what happens, though some sympathise with her. You need to decide what your own view is. Read through the story and note all the occasions when you consider her to be a victim, and all those when you think she is responsible for her own problems. Remember to find a quotation to support each of your points.

Copy and complete the following table, balancing out the arguments for and against and adding some points of your own. Find quotations to support each of your own points. You will probably have more points in one column than the other.

▼ MADAME LOISEL	
▼ POINTS IN HER FAVOUR	▼ POINTS AGAINST HER
She deserves more than society offers her – her birth is an ‘error of Fate.’	She is vain and frivolous – she had no fine dresses and no jewellery, and that was all she cared about.
Her husband is rather boring and too ‘careful with his money’.	She is ungrateful to a thoughtful husband.
Her suffering is not related to what she did; it is unfair that she loses all her beauty whereas Madame Forestier remains ‘still young, still beautiful’.	She is the victim of her own pride; she could have simply told her friend the truth but did not want to lose face.
Her hard work at the end makes her admirable – ‘quickly and heroically, she resigned herself to what she could not alter’.	Yes, she does make up for her mistake – but this does not mean she did not deserve what happened to her.

► Having considered all the evidence, what is your overall opinion of Madame Loisel and how Maupassant has presented her?

The other characters are not so developed, although Monsieur Loisel is the most important. Here are two candidates' views of him. With which do you agree and why?

**EXAMPLE STUDENT ANSWER A**

Monsieur Loisel is a loving husband, who is presented by the writer as both generous and indulgent. He goes to great lengths to get the invitation to the occasion and even sleeps in a separate room while his wife enjoys the dancing. When faced with the problems caused by the loss of the necklace, he works hard with his wife to pay for the new necklace. He never criticises her. He is her victim.

**EXAMPLE STUDENT ANSWER B**

Monsieur Loisel is only a junior clerk without any kind of ambition. He loves his wife but has no real understanding of her or what her hopes must be; he is out of his depth with her. At the end he is as stubbornly proud as his wife and, instead of suggesting that she simply tells the truth, he accepts their joint fate. They are equally responsible for what happens.

Madame Forestier, Madame Loisel's friend, is not written about in detail. While she shows some kindness by loaning the necklace, she doesn't tell Madame Loisel that it is an imitation and is quite sharp when it is returned late. At the end of the story, is she really sympathetic or is she mocking Madame Loisel? Ironically, she is exactly the kind of woman that Madame Loisel, at the start of the story, had hoped to be.