

Compare how the authors of two texts you have studied present barriers to love.

Barriers to love can take many forms: parental disapproval of a suitor on the grounds of class, race or religion; physical distance which puts stress on a relationship; emotional turmoil which results in us irrationally pushing away those closest to us, to name but a few. For the writers of *The Awakening*, *Talking in Bed* and *One Flesh*, however, the barriers to love occur within marriage, a place where ironically we might expect barriers to love to be removed, and mainly because of the expectations society places on those who are married.

Written almost seventy years apart, both *The Awakening* and the two post-1900 poems show how society's expectations of duty within marriage, more especially in 1899 in *The Awakening* perhaps but still relevant by the time the poems were written in the early 1960s, can result in disconnection within the marriage shown through a breakdown in communication.

The Awakening might be seen as an example of New Woman fiction which challenged the Victorian ideal of the dutiful wife and mother. Chopin tells the story of Edna Pontellier, a wife and mother who feels unfulfilled by her conventional domestic role and determines to overcome the barrier of society's expectations of her in order to be with Robert, a young man who she falls in love with.

Chopin structures the novel in order to show the stages of Edna's rebellion against social expectation. At the very beginning, Chopin includes the image of a caged songbird, a common symbol for a domestic Victorian woman, who speaks 'a language which nobody understood' and whose noise leads Edna's husband to 'an exclamation of disgust.' Here Chopin foreshadows the breakdown of communication which occurs because Edna fails to speak the language of a devoted wife. Mr Pontellier regards Edna 'as one who looks at a valuable piece of property' (in Louisiana at that time women were regarded as their husband's legal property). It is Mr Pontellier's absolute certainty of his wife's obligation to him, a trait of the Creole husband, that means he 'is never jealous' and so ironically allows Edna to spend time in Robert's company, which leads to Edna 'beginning to realise her position in the universe.' Edna's rebellion includes renewing her interest in painting and learning to swim 'as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul.' Afterwards, Edna shows open defiance of her husband's wishes when she refuses to join him in bed where 'another time...she would, through habit, have yielded to his desire... unthinkingly.'

Chopin uses setting to help show the stages of Edna's attempt to break down the barrier presented by social convention. Her initial rebellion (above) takes place away from her marital home at Grand Isle. The morning following her defiance of her husband, Edna's invitation to Robert to sail across to Cheniere Caminada with her made her feel 'as if she were being borne away from some anchorage which had held her fast, whose chains...had snapped the night before...leaving her free to drift whithersoever she chose to set her sails.' In this new setting, Robert and Edna grow closer and she realises that she has changed: 'she was seeing with different eyes and making the acquaintance of new conditions in herself.' Instead of a return to dutiful

domesticity back in New Orleans, Chopin heightens Edna's ongoing rebellion against a backdrop of 'the cut glass, the silver, the heavy damask which...were the envy of many women whose husbands were less generous than Mr Pontellier.' Edna discards the trappings of her domestic role by refusing to stay at home on Tuesdays, her reception day, and by changing 'her gown for a comfortable and commodious wrapper.' Finally, Edna moves out of the marital home while her husband is away 'without even waiting for an answer...regarding his opinions or wishes on the matter' and begins an affair with a womaniser, Alcee Arobin.

In spite of these attempts to break down the barrier of social convention which Edna believes is preventing her and Robert from being together, Chopin shows how Edna's rebellion does not produce a neat solution. When she throws off her wedding ring and tries to crush it, her 'boot heel did not make an indenture, not a mark upon the little glittering circlet' and her new home is described as 'the pigeon house', a return to the effective symbol of the caged bird. It is, however, Robert's decision to conform to social expectation and so end the relationship which means Edna is unable to overcome this barrier except through suicide. As she swims out to sea at the end, Edna realises that Robert 'would never understand' her and Chopin cleverly changes the metaphor of the seabird from 'winging its flight away' to now 'with a broken wing...circling disabled down, down to the water.'

Although poetry cannot use setting to show the attempt to break down a barrier to love over time in the same detail as Chopin does, both '*Talking in Bed*' and '*One Flesh*' choose the marital bed as an 'emblem' of social convention and, through it, are able to show how expectations have led to disconnection within both couples. Larkin's use of 'ought' in the opening line shows both the expectation that married couples communicate easily in this setting but also a hint that this communication has broken down. (This links to Edna's refusal to join her husband in bed discussed earlier.) The second stanza starts with 'yet' which confirms that this marriage is not living up to expectation as in this bed 'time passes silently'. Larkin plays on the word 'lying' which seems at first to relate to lying in bed but which might suggest that instead of 'two people being honest', dishonesty is a barrier to this couple's love. Interestingly, Edna does not need to lie to her husband because he takes her honesty for granted. The same difficulty of communication within the marriage, shown through the imagery of the parrot in *The Awakening*, is shown by Larkin's use of half-rhyme in stanzas 1-3 and through the ambiguous meaning in the final two lines: 'words at once true and kind/or not untrue and not unkind.' These lines do not mean the same as each other and help to leave the reader with a sense of disconnection in this relationship.

In '*One Flesh*', Jennings discusses how the passion has gone out of her parents' marriage so that they are 'lying apart now, each in a separate bed.' Just as Edna's loneliness within her marriage makes her remember her girlish infatuations, the poet's mother lies in her bed 'dreaming of childhood/All men elsewhere.' The disconnection between the poet's parents is shown in the contrast between him being in 'light' and her lying in 'shadows', and in the fact that 'they hardly ever touch/Or if they do, it is like a confession.' This religious imagery could link to their marriage vows as in the

title 'One Flesh', and so again to social expectation. Unlike in *The Awakening* or '*Talking in Bed*', however, there is a sense that there was 'a former passion' and Jennings uses a contrast between that 'fire' which 'has now grown cold' to show how this separation is a barrier to the physical intimacy expected of marriage. Where Chopin and Larkin offer no hope of overcoming barriers to love, Jennings uses a steady rhyme to suggest an ongoing bond between her parents. Although they are 'strangely apart' she believes they are also 'strangely close together' and her question 'Do they know they're old?' might suggest her parents should accept that the nature of their marriage will change over time.

Both in *The Awakening* and in '*Talking in Bed*' and '*One Flesh*', barriers to love exist for the married characters. In *The Awakening*, Edna is fighting pre-1900 society's expectations of her as a wife to be free to love Robert. In the post-1900 poetry, both poems were written in the early 1960s when divorce was unusual and many couples stayed together unhappily; these couples are failing to meet society's expectations of marriage through a lack of honesty or physical intimacy. All three writers use setting successfully to convey social expectation and each show how a difficulty of communication is a barrier to love, Chopin through imagery, Larkin through half-rhyme and ambiguous language, and Jennings through contrast.

Where has this candidate...	
Assessment Objective	Where has this candidate...
1	<p>Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression</p> <p>a) Argued from a clear point of view b) Argued with confidence c) Made original insights drawn from personal reflections d) Structured the essay in a logical way e) Used accurate terminology f) Showed an understanding of literary concepts g) Expressed ideas with crystal-clarity h) Used topic sentences at the start of paragraphs</p>
2	<p>Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts</p> <p>i) Showed an understanding that the text is crafted, the author a craftsman/woman j) Showed an understanding of how authors achieve effects k) Demonstrated how those effects in turn shape meaning</p>
3	<p>Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received</p> <p>l) Showed evidence of contextual knowledge m) Integrated that contextual knowledge into the analysis of the text</p>
4	<p>Explore connections across literary texts</p> <p>n) Compared texts o) Interpreted texts in their shared contexts</p>
5	<p>Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations.</p> <p>p) Engaged with the debate set up in the task q) Considered other points of view</p>
<div style="border: 2px solid red; padding: 10px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <p>Now read the exemplar and label sentences with the appropriate letter.</p> </div>	

- The Awakening by Kate Chopin (1899)
- Talking in Bed (1960)
- One Flesh (1966)

Now read the exemplar and label sentences with the appropriate letter.