Making Inferences About the Narrator

Inferences are logical guesses based on the details the narrator provides and what you know about life. When reading "The Yellow Wallpaper," try to perceive things as the narrator does. Occasionally, though, stand back from her to examine her perceptions and actions with a critical eye. Use the sequence chart to answer the questions inserted throughout the story.

1. Why is the narrator writing in secret? (p. 768)

2. Describe the relationship between the narrator and her husband. (p. 768)

3. What do the details about the room suggest about its function? (p. 769)

4. Describe the effect the wallpaper is having on the narrator. (p. 770)

5. How do you explain the figure beginning to appear in the wallpaper? (p. 773)

6. What is the "idea" that John says the narrator should not "let . . . enter your mind"? (p. 774)

7. The narrator's attitude seems to have changed. Do you think she will get better? (p. 775)

8. What is the narrator's condition? (p. 776)

9. What does the narrator now believe? (p. 778)
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Literary Analysis SkillBuilder

First-Person Narrator
The narrator relates the story's events to the reader and, in the first-person point of view, is a character in the story. In this story, the first-person narrator begins to see images in the wallpaper: bars, bulbous eyes, a creeping woman, and more. If the wallpaper reflects the narrator's psychological state, readers can use it as evidence to draw conclusions about her feelings and preoccupations. Use the chart below to list images from the story that describe the wallpaper. Then try to interpret each image, associating it with some aspect of the narrator's life.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
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Follow Up: With a small group, discuss conclusions you draw about the narrator's problem. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using a first-person narrator to tell this story, especially in light of the narrator's condition?
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**Words to Know SkillBuilder**

**Words to Know**

- atrocious
- basely
- derision
- felicity
- impertinence
- inanimate
- patent
- perseverance
- querulous
- undulating

**A.** On each blank line, write the word from the word list that the rhyme describes.

If this is your style, you find things that are wrong.
You whine and complain as you grumble along.

If something is too clear for you to miss,
You might describe that thing as being this.

This is what you show when it’s a long way to the top,
But, though you are exhausted, you keep on and
will not stop.

If this describes the artworks you create,
The comments of the critics won’t be “Great!”

If this describes the ride you choose,
Your cash may not be all you lose.

This is treating folks with less respect than they deserve,
To which they may respond by saying, “What a
lot of nerve!”

This does not describe a daisy or a doctor or a dog.
It does describe a rock, a chair, a sidewalk, and a log.

Is this the state of mind you’re in?
No wonder you can’t help but grin.

This is the reaction other people show to you
When they just laugh in nasty ways at everything
you do.

This is how a cheater cheats,
Cowards lie about their feats,
Robbers rob or big kids bully,
Wolves deceive in clothing woolly.

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

(6)

(7)

(8)

(9)

(10)

**B.** Write a description of the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” from the point of view of her husband. Use at least four of the Words to Know.
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Selection Quiz

Recall the events in Gilman's short story, and then answer the questions in one or two sentences.

1. Why do the narrator and her husband rent a house in the country?

2. Why must the narrator write her journal in secret?

3. The narrator describes the wallpaper in the bedroom as "committing every artistic sin." Explain what she means.

4. What images does the narrator first see on the wallpaper?

5. The narrator later sees a woman behind the wallpaper pattern. What is the woman doing?

6. When the narrator sees the "wallpaper" woman outside, what is the woman doing, and why does the narrator sympathize?

7. Why does the narrator begin peeling the wallpaper?

8. What does the narrator say she plans to do with the rope, and then what does she actually do with it?

9. When the narrator's husband unlocks and enters the bedroom, she says to him, "I've got out at last." What does she mean?

10. At the end of the story, why does the narrator's husband faint?
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Selection Test

A. Circle the letter next to one of the quotations. Then consider two things—what the imagery suggests about the wallpaper and what it suggests about the narrator herself—and make notes in the boxes to reflect your thoughts. (10 points each)

a. "But in the places where it isn't faded and where the sun is just so—I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure, that seems to skulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design."

b. "But nobody could climb through that pattern—it strangles so; I think that is why it has so many heads.
   They get through, and then the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside down, and makes their eyes white!"

c. "Then I peeled off all the paper I could reach standing on the floor. It sticks horribly and the pattern just enjoys it! All those strangled heads and bulbous eyes and waddling fungus growths just shriek with derision!"

1. What does this image suggest about the wallpaper?

2. What does this image suggest about the narrator?

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B. Write the letter of the best answer. This exercise is continued on the next page.
(6 points each)

1. The narrator disagrees with medical specialists about the benefits or drawbacks of
   a. physical exercise. c. eating certain foods.
   b. mental stimulation. d. spending time with her baby.

2. John, the narrator's husband, believes that her condition is a result of
   a. insanity. c. pampering.
   b. boredom. d. nervousness.

3. The narrator believes that the woman behind the wallpaper pattern is
   a. happy. c. in danger.
   b. trapped. d. dangerous.
4. The narrator believes that John and his sister Jennie are being influenced by
   a. each other.       c. the narrator’s mind.
   b. the wallpaper.    d. hatred for the narrator.

5. The narrator eventually wants to remain in the house in order to
   a. write.           c. study the wallpaper.
   b. spy on the garden.    d. avoid social interactions.

6. At the end of the story, the narrator believes that she is
   a. the woman in the wallpaper.
   b. the victim of the woman in the wallpaper.
   c. the protector of the woman in the wallpaper.
   d. the one who has trapped the woman in the wallpaper.

C. Words to Know. Write the letter of the best answer. (4 points each)

1. A person with **perseverance** is **least** likely to be called a
   a. brat.     b. quitter.  c. slow learner.

2. In which kind of dancing are the movements **most** likely to be described as **undulating**?
   a. hula dancing  b. break dancing  c. waltzing

3. A **querulous** person is someone who is
   a. timid.       b. inefficient.  c. hard to please.

4. You would **laugh with derision** at a suggestion that you thought was
   a. very witty.   b. ridiculous.  c. only mildly amusing.

5. It is impossible for an **inanimate** object to
   a. be moved.    b. make noise.  c. feel pain.

D. Answer **one** of the following questions based on your understanding of the story. Write your answer on a separate sheet of paper. (12 points)

1. Why do you think the narrator imagines what she does about the woman behind the pattern in the wallpaper?

2. To what extent do you think John is responsible for the narrator’s mental breakdown? Support your opinion with details from the story.

E. Linking Literature to Life. Answer the following question based on your own experience and knowledge. Write your answer on a separate sheet of paper. (12 points)

   Which do you think is worse—having too many interests and too many demands on one’s time and energy or having too few interests and demands? Explain.