“The Yellow Wallpaper” -- Handout -- 1

At the time when this as written, many doctors assumed that females were weaker than males and assumed that this weakness manifested itself in what were then called “nervous conditions.” The doctors often would misdiagnose boredom, clinical depression, and just plain frustration as a “nervous disposition” and submit the women to their cure: often, complete rest. Doesn’t sound too bad, but what they meant by that was the women had absolutely NO stimulation of any kind. No reading, no talking to anyone, no writing, no walking, no exercise, etc. As you can imagine, the women would often go stir-crazy in very short order.

The frightening thing was this: the doctors would usually refuse to discuss the cases with the patients! The doctors would discuss only with the husbands or family members of the patients. This was to prevent undue “stress” to the women. Even as recently as the 1960’s, doctors would sometimes not discuss women’s cases with the women themselves. In fact, a very popular movie of the 1960’s, *Love Story*, revolves around the notion that a young woman is dying, but her doctor and her husband won’t tell her so!

The second frightening aspect of this story is that women weren’t always suffering from a “nervous disposition” when their husbands put them under the doctor’s care. While it wasn’t common, it also wasn’t unusual for a man, upon becoming tired of his wife, would put her under an unscrupulous’ doctor’s care. Working together, the woman would be driven insane, at which point her husband could commit her for life to the sanitarium and he could “in good conscience” go on with his life.

Such *may* be the case of “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Your assignment is to use your two highlighters as you read. Highlight passages that seem to indicate the woman IS insane in one color. Highlight passages that seem to indicate the woman is being DRIVEN insane in your second color. When you are done reading the story, answer the questions on the other sheet.

“The Yellow Wallpaper” -- Questions -- 2 Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. What point-of-view is used for this story? Do you find this choice by the author effective? Why or why not?

2. Do you think the woman’s husband had her best interests at heart? Why or why not? Cite at least 2 passages that supports your answer.

3. What is your final analysis? Was the woman insane to begin or was she driven insane? Why do you think that? Cite at least 3 passages from the text that supports your answer. (Continue your answer on the back.)

“The Yellow Wallpaper” -- Questions -- 3

4. Imagine yourself as the woman. Would your sanity have survived the summer? Why do you think the way you do?

5. What symbolism does the wallpaper begin to acquire? How is this accomplished on the part of the author?