

# The Awakening

## *Sample Analytical Paper Topics*

The following paper topics are designed to test your understanding of the novel as a whole and to analyze important themes and literary devices. Following each question is a sample outline to help you get started.

### TOPIC #1

Although Edna thinks she will find true love and happiness with Robert, every single man in Edna's life has tried to control and/or repress her. Not one of them understands her need for independence.

How has each man in Edna's life attempted to control and/or repress Edna?

#### *Outline*

- I. **Thesis Statement:** *None of the men in Edna's life understands her need for independence; they all try to control and/or repress her in some way.*
- II. **The Colonel, Edna's father, is a strict disciplinarian.**
  - A. Edna comes from a strict Presbyterian background.
  - B. "Authority and coercion" are necessary to manage a wife.
- III. **Léonce Pontellier believes women should live only for their families' well-being.**
  - A. It is the wife's place to look after the children.
  - B. He is courteous as long as Edna is submissive.
  - C. An artistic pastime is all right as long as it doesn't interfere with family duties.
  - D. A wife has to act in ways that will be beneficial to her husband's business.
- IV. **Alcée Arobin is a womanizer who knows how to take advantage.**
  - A. He senses her latent sexuality and knows how to bring it out.
  - B. Once he has gotten her, he becomes proprietary and paternalistic.
- V. **Robert Lebrun wants a traditional wife the same way Léonce does.**
  - A. He tells Edna the end of the book she's reading so she doesn't have to bother finishing it.
  - B. He leaves when he realizes Edna doesn't want to marry him.

### TOPIC #2

Adèle Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz both are opposite ends of a spectrum, and both influence Edna's awakening and her final decision.

How are the women different, and how has each woman affected Edna?

#### *Outline*

- I. **Thesis Statement:** *Adèle Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz are polar opposites, and both influence Edna in different ways.*

**II. Adèle Ratignolle is a “mother-woman.”**

- A. She is beautiful in a classic, very feminine way.
- B. She has a baby every two years and is pregnant now.
- C. She plays music to entertain her family and brighten her home.

**III. Mademoiselle Reisz is an artist.**

- A. She is small and ugly with an unpleasant personality.
- B. She is unmarried and childless.
- C. She plays piano for the love of art.

**IV. Adèle wants Edna to be a better wife and mother.**

- A. She thinks Léonce should stay home more so he and Edna can spend more time together.
- B. She reminds Edna to think of her children.

**V. Mademoiselle Reisz encourages Edna to be an artist.**

- A. She tells Edna that a true artist must have courage.
- B. She helps Robert and Edna get together.

**TOPIC #3**

Chopin uses natural imagery in a romantic and sexual way to set the mood for her novel. What are some of the different images?

**Outline**

**I. Thesis Statement:** *Chopin uses natural imagery in a romantic and sexual way to set the mood for her novel.*

**II. The sea is a symbol of romantic possibility.**

- A. The sea is seductive and sensuous.
- B. The sea allows for limitless expansion.
- C. The sea is a place of rebirth.

**III. Animals are sexual.**

- A. Edna is a beautiful, sleek animal waking up in the sun.
- B. Edna's animalism responds to Victor's sexual story.

**IV. The moon shines a mysterious romantic light.**

- A. The moon takes away the weight of the darkness.
- B. The moon allows the spirit of the night to rise up.
- C. The moon allows Edna to hear clearly the voices of the night.

**V. Breezes, odors, and mists all speak sensually to Edna.**

**TOPIC #4**

Edna's awakening takes many different forms. She awakens first to a vague dissatisfaction in her life, then to the freedom of sharing herself, to the passion of music, to the physical pleasure of swimming, to the sensual pleasure of her own body, to the intensity of true love, to the pleasure of solitude and independence, to sexual passion, and, finally, to limitation.

Describe the course of Edna's awakening.

### ***Outline***

- I. Thesis Statement:** *Edna's awakening takes place over the course of the novel and includes several different smaller awakenings, usually of a sensual nature.*
- II. Edna awakens to a vague dissatisfaction with her life.**
- III. Edna awakens to the pleasure and freedom in sharing her thoughts.**
- IV. Edna awakens to the passion of music.**
- V. Edna awakens to the pleasure and freedom of swimming.**
- VI. Edna awakens to the sensual pleasure of her own body.**
- VII. Edna awakens to the intensity of true love.**
- VIII. Edna awakens to the pleasure and necessity of solitude.**
- IX. Edna awakens to sexual passion.**
- X. Edna awakens to limitation.**