

# Be careful what you wish for essay sample

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This essay is to compare and contrast the two short stories “ How I Met My Husband” and “ The Diamond Necklace”. The theme in both of these stories is the fact that you should appreciate what you have and not wish for what you can’t have. As the title hints at, in both of these stories there is the desire for something that leads to a life changing situation. For one person the ending is a good one but, for the second story, the ending shows by wishing for something that you do not have can lead to a change in your whole life’s situation. There is love in both stories with the contrast being that in the first story the love is for a man; the second story’s love is for the material things that a woman believes is what would make her happy. This all ties in to the idiom of “ be careful what you wish for, you just may get it” (Idioms and Phrases, n. d.). This phrase means that sometimes “ if you get things that you desire, there may be unforeseen and unpleasant consequences” (Idioms and Phrases, n. d.).

In the two stories of this essay, there was something unforeseen that happened in one and very unpleasant consequences in the other. The authors in both stories have used imagery to show the consequences of wanting something you can’t have. In “ The Diamond Necklace” the imagery shows where a young beautiful lady who was never happy with her life ends up looking and feeling much worse. “ Her hair was badly done, her skirts were awry, and her hands were red” (de Maupassant, 1884). In the story “ How I Met My Husband”, the imagery is more subtle and has a happier ending than the first story. The author describes how the girl in the story feels when she realizes a letter will not be coming from someone who she believes she loves.

“ One day walking back with the hydro bill stuck in my hand, that was all, looking across at the fairgrounds with the full-blown milkweed and dark teasels, so much like fall, it just struck me: No letter was ever going to come” (Munro, 1974). The setting for these stories, one in the city and one in the country, show it doesn't matter where you live or how you live, everyone is human and we wish for things that just don't work out the way we think they should. “ How I Met My Husband”, is set out in the country. You can tell this by the imagery that the author uses to show what the landscape is like and also by the telling of where the story takes place, “ bought an old house out on the Fifth Line, about five miles out of town.... town people buying up old farms, not to work them but to live on them” (Munro, 1974).

The story is told with a first person point of view, with the main character, a 15 year old girl, telling the story of her life. Using the first person point of view tells the readers that this is how the girl feels what happened in the story but we need to keep in mind that the facts could be different by embellishing them or to even be hiding something that would make her not look as innocent as the story portrays, she is wishing for a relationship with an older man whom she believes she is in love with. This appears to be taking place in the late 1950's to this reader. Times were innocent and that is when people wanted to live in the country since cars were more available so they could get to town and be away from the traffic and population. The time is shown by the lines, “ Peebles had an automatic washer and dryer, the first I ever saw.... not having to struggle with the wringer and hang up and haul down”.

I can remember my mother having a wringer washer, putting clothes through the wringer when I was young. That is why I believe this story takes place in the 50's. The image in my mind of that makes me think that while the young girl isn't wishing for a better life, she did live a harder life while living with her parents and she had to do harder housework there. This again shows that no matter what walk of life you come from there are things you wish for, or enjoy, that are not common to your own life. Comparing the times and setting for the second story again shows that it doesn't matter what era you live in or what setting you may live in, you need to be careful of what you wish for. "The Diamond Necklace" appears to be set in the city, and an entirely different time era. This feeling is created by the author using the imagery of what the main character, Mathilde, is imagining her life should be like.

The story states, "She thought of silent antechambers hung with Oriental tapestry, illumined by tall bronze candelabra, and two great footmen in knee breeches who sleep in the big armchairs, made drowsy by the oppressive heat of the stove" (de Maupassant, 1884). As this story was written years before the first story it is obvious it would have been written of a different era. Remembering reading other stories where coachmen wore knee breeches, sitting by fires waiting on their people to need use of the coach to return home; is why this story appears to be set in a different era. The imagery of parlors with fireplaces, men outside with fires to keep them warm, with Mathilde thinking of grand tapestries is where it shows she is not happy with her life and wishing to have more. The symbolism of the first story is not an animate object but more of symbol of life and coming of age.

The story talks about how Edie, the 15 year old, lived. It shows her thoughts, her hopes and dreams and her first crush. When the story begins there is a plane that flies over the home that Edie is living and working at. The reader is to believe that the pilot of the plane, Chris Watters, will eventually be Edie's husband. This is the first time that she has talked with a male figure who had paid any attention to her and it made her nervous; " My heart was knocking away, my tongue was dried up. I had to say something but I couldn't. My throat was closed and I was like a deaf-and-dumb" (Munro, 1974). When someone feels like Edie felt, it is like they don't want to seem stupid and they want the other person to think well of them. They, and she, want to make a good impression.

The reader can relate to this very well if they have ever felt this way when meeting someone they wanted to impress, especially when they are young and meeting someone who they would like to go out with. To miss the feelings of a crush, or first puppy love would take away a part of growing up. In contrast, the symbol in *The Diamond Necklace* is the necklace itself. Mathilde's troubles come when her lowly clerk husband receives an invitation to a ball. He has tried to get this invitation because he wanted to please his wife. Instead she is not pleased as she states she has nothing to wear. After her husband relinquishes money he has put aside to buy a gun for sporting to buy her a dress, she is still unhappy because she has no jewelry to wear and feels as though she will still appear poor to the rest of the guests at the ball.

Her husband suggests she ask her friend if she has anything his wife could borrow and Mathilde thought this was a good idea. It ends up being a life

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changing decision when she chooses a diamond necklace just so she can feel and be thought of as rich. “ The night of the ball arrived.... she was prettier than any other woman present...all the men looked at her...she was remarked by the minister himself” (de Maupassant, 1884). As stated in an article, “ Mathilde Loisel’s doomed attempts to escape her lowly station in life by borrowing a beautiful diamond necklace for a ball have a famous final twist” (Mullan, 2008, Dec 13). Although Mathilde had a grand time at the ball, dancing until 4: 00 a. m. while her husband slept, at the end of the ball she ends up losing the necklace which changes her life into an even lower class as she and her husband have to let the house help go, he works two jobs and it is to buy another necklace to replace the one lost without letting the original owner knowing about it.

This shows readers that everyone should try to be happy with what they have in life and not try to be something that they are not. The theme is the same in both of these stories, but the authors have different outcomes showing that the content of the writing is different. The tone in both stories is a device that was used, which are similar, but still are different because of the outcomes of each individual story. In the first story the tone is reflective with a happy and content feeling. Whereas, the second story’s reflective tone shows that there is pride in working towards a goal and achieving it yet knowing it could have been a much easier life if the characters had of told the truth from the beginning. In How I Met My Husband, it is looking back with memories of how Edie thought her life would continue. Before leaving town, Edie had gone to tell Chris his alleged fiancée had gone to a park and

would be back by five o'clock. It ended up with Chris kissing Edie and telling her it was time for him to be leaving.

He promised her he would write her a letter, letting her know where he was and asked if she would like to come visit him. Edie waited on that promised letter for a long time " the fairgrounds with the full-blown milkweed and dark teasels, so much like fall, it just struck me: No letter was ever going to come" (Munro, 1974). It had been summer when Chris had left and this leaves the image of fall approaching. This also shows how much time has passed since Chris left and how long it took her to realize there would be no letter for her. Even though Edie realizes there will be no letter she would keep going to the mailbox " but my heart was heavy now like a lump of lead. I only smiled because I thought of the mailman counting on it, and he didn't have an easy life, with the winter driving ahead" (Munro, 1974).

Edie also remembered the mailman telling her " You've got the smile I've been waiting on all day!" (Munro, 1974). Even though she realizes there will be no letter she is trying to make someone else happy. Readers feel the disappointment with her heavy heart, and can relate to this feeling if they have ever been in love and had broken up. When you look into this story deeply enough, according to an article on this poem, you can see where there is a lot of secrecy involved in the plot, " Throughout this story, problems result when characters disclose their own private information or try to gain access to that of others, and good things result when characters discreetly withhold information" (Sutton, 2005).

In *The Diamond Necklace* the reflection would come more as a lesson learned the hard way. After losing her friend's necklace, Mathilde and her husband, not telling the friend, found a necklace that looked like the one borrowed and returned that necklace instead. Mathilde was hoping that her friend would not notice the differences that there were in the two separate necklaces and was happy when her friend did not even look in the box to make sure the necklace was inside. The price of the necklace the couple had to buy to replace the borrowed necklace was so high that they had to lower their standards of living even more than what Mathilde had hated. "Thereafter Madame Loisel knew the horrible existence of the needy.... they dismissed their servant...rented a garret under the roof" (de Maupassant, 1884).

It took many years of pinching pennies, paying back their loans that were borrowed to be able to buy the new necklace "At the end of ten years they had paid everything...rates of usury and the accumulations of the compound interest" (de Maupassant, 1884). Readers can see the impact of what could happen if they are too proud to be themselves by everything the Loisel's had to go through to repay Mathilde's friend the lost necklace. Looking into the whole story you can see the pride they do have by working so hard and enduring hardships to be able to do this. We also see that Mathilde's husband had to love her very much to go through everything he did from trying to make her happy up to saving her pride by admitting to the friend that she had lost the necklace she had borrowed. Both stories have twists and unexpected endings.



In "How I Met My Husband", the reader has believed throughout the story that it would be Chris that Edie ended up marrying. It turns out that after realizing there would be no letter from Chris and how she did not want to even go to the mailbox until she was old, hoping for a letter, she did quit meeting the mailman for the mail; "I imagined me making this journey day after day and year after year, and my hair starting to get gray" (Munro, 1974). The author uses the images of school beginning and how the flowers look at that time of the year (Belle, 2010). Much to her surprise, the mailman called her employers, asking for her and asking her to go out with him. Edie did start going out with him and it appears they had a very happy marriage by the ending of the story, "He always tells the children the story of how I went after him by sitting by the mailbox every day, and naturally I laugh and let him, because I like for people to think what pleases them and makes them happy" (Munro, 1974).

This is the happy ending of not getting what you wished for. What would have happened if Edie had received a letter from Chris? She may have gone for a year or more, waiting on him and letting the man she is happily married to get away. With Chris liking to travel around she could have been sitting at home wondering where he was and what he was doing most, if not all, of the time. She was lucky not to have gotten what she wished for. In "The Diamond Necklace", after paying off all of the bills, it had made a drastic change in Mathilde because of the hard life she lived, "She had become the woman of impoverished households - strong and hard and rough. With frowsy hair, skirts askew and red hands, she talked loud while washing the floor with great swishes of water", (de Maupassant, 1884). It is hard to feel

sorry for Mathilde as she had brought this on herself for wanting more than was possible.

The twist that is at the ending of this story though is really a lesson everyone needs to learn. It so happened that while Mathilde was walking in the park one day she saw her old friend. She still looked “ young and beautiful and charming” (de Maupassant, 1884). Mathilde decided to tell her old friend what had happened now that everything was paid for, and telling her proudly about the hardships she and her husband had endured throughout the years “ And she smiled with a joy that was at once proud and ingenuous” (de Maupassant, 1884). When her friend found out what had happened she took Mathilde’s hands and told her “ Oh, my poor Mathilde! Why, my necklace was paste! It was worth at most only five hundred francs!” (de Maupassant, 1884).

While Mathilde did get her wish to dance and “ appear” to be a wealthy woman, she was not lucky in the end; she ended up having a harder life than what she would have had plus the work she had to do to pay for a necklace took away her beauty. There is irony in this story because Mathilde felt important wearing a necklace she believed to be true diamonds, when in fact they were nothing but imitation jewels. If she had of known from the beginning, would she have felt the thrills of appearing rich and successful in her marriage? The outcome, since she did not go to her friend to confess losing the necklace, led Mathilde into a life further away from what she dreamed of to begin with. In conclusion, there are still times in all walks of life where we need to learn to be happy with our stations in life. If there are some material things that we covet then we need to work to earn the money

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to buy these things. If you get your wishes to come true it doesn't mean that it will always end up for the best.

Edie could have ended up with Chris who could have left her sitting in a house while he ran around the country. Mathilde could have saved her and her husband many years of hardship if she at first hadn't been too proud to go to the ball without an expensive bauble to wear. She also could have gone to her friend and admitted that she had lost the necklace where she would have found out the true value of it. This would have again changed the way her life changed. The biggest similarity in both of these stories would be the moral of the story. In wishing for things that are not to be you can make life harder for yourself or you could end passing up a greater and truer way of life.

In an article, *Hypermedia as an educational technology: A review of the quantitative research literature on learner comprehension, control, and style*, it states that, "there is no universally agreed-upon measure of comprehension, and thus comparisons across studies are rarely straightforward" (Dillon, 1998). I believe where this is true over different studies it is also true with stories that have a basic theme but are told with different settings, symbols and details. It all depends on the reader, what they take away from reading these stories and what they comprehend as the meaning of said story.

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