

Symbolism in guy de maupassant's the necklace

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Hayley Hughes Professor Fowler English 1102 9 February 2013 Short Story Essay Guy de Maupassant's short story "The Necklace" uses a diamond necklace to symbolize two different things. The first thing the necklace represents is that deceiving others will lead to one's downfall. The necklace also symbolizes how the effects of greed can change a person. In the story, the reader sees the main character's personal growth from beginning to end due to losing a diamond necklace.

Mathilde Loisel's life is turned upside down because she was materialistic, but by the end of the story Mathilde is wiser and more admirable. Mathilde changed in ways that could not have been possible had she not lost the necklace. The story opens with the beautiful Mathilde Loisel fantasizing about luxuries she and her husband cannot afford. When her husband comes home with an invitation to an exclusive party, she is upset because she does not have anything fancy to wear. Even after her husband gives her some money for a dress, she then complains about not having jewelry.

Since she does not own any expensive jewelry, Mathilde goes to her friend Madame Forestier and borrows a diamond necklace. She absolutely loves the necklace and when she and her husband attend the party, everyone notices her and the necklace. After they return from the party, Mathilde realizes she has lost the necklace. However, instead of telling Madame Forestier that the necklace had been lost, Mathilde buys a replacement necklace worth 40,000 francs and gives that to her friend hoping she would not see the difference.

She and her husband then spend the next ten years working to pay for the cost of the necklace only to find out that the original necklace had been a fake. Even though her hardship could have been avoided completely,

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Mathilde became a better person from losing the necklace. The necklace is the main symbol in "The Necklace." What is a symbol? According to *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing*, "a symbol is a substitute for the elements being signified," (Roberts and Zweig, 382). The necklace could be considered a cultural symbol.

A cultural symbol is universally recognized (Roberts and Zweig, 383). Out of all the jewelry Mathilde could have chosen, she chose the diamond necklace. Maupassant most likely chose a diamond necklace because people would recognize the gravity of the situation in the story; most people could understand the value of a diamond necklace as opposed to some of the other jewelry mentioned in the story, which makes the diamond necklace a cultural symbol. The necklace could also be considered a contextual symbol.

Unlike a cultural symbol, a contextual symbol gets its meaning from the story (Roberts and Zweig, 383-384). In this story, the necklace represents the fact that appearances are not always what they seem and that the bitter truth of reality can lead to one's downfall. Mathilde wants to wear a diamond necklace in order for people to think she is wealthier than she is. When she borrows it from Madame Forestier, who is wealthier than Mathilde, she has no reason to believe that the necklace is a fake.

Because Mathilde thinks the diamonds as being real, she thinks that others will believe she is wealthy too. In deceiving others of her wealth, she essentially deceives herself. For example, when it is time for them to leave the party her husband gives her the shawl she brought; she does not want anyone to see her wearing the shawl because it reminded her that she was not wealthy and she did not want anyone to find out. She wants to live out

this fantasy as long as she possibly can and runs outside with the shawl hoping no one will notice.

When she loses the necklace, she is brought back to reality and must deal with the consequences. Instead of accepting her reality that she was not wealthy and being greedy, she set herself up for disaster. The necklace symbolizes greed and how it can affect a person. In the beginning of the story, Mathilde is greedy. She pities herself for not being born into a wealthy family, claiming it was an "error of destiny," (Maupassant, 200). She and her husband are most likely middle-class, but she is still unhappy with their financial status. Her husband, Mr. Loisel, is the exact opposite.

He takes pleasure in the little things, even praising his wife's beef stew while she daydreamed about the finest cuisines (Maupassant, 200). All he wants to do is please his wife, but Mathilde is never satisfied. It is because of her greed that she ends up borrowing the necklace in the first place. After losing the necklace and giving the replacement to her friend, not only had the Loisels' lifestyle changed, but Mathilde also started to change. She had to do cleaning jobs to earn money, dressed in cheap clothes, and argued with food vendors about the price of their goods in order to save every penny.

After the ten years of hard labor, the story describes Mathilde as "the strong, hard, and rude woman of poor households," (Maupassant, 204). Even though she still reminisced about the party, unlike before where she pitied herself for not being wealthy, now she contemplates what her life would be like had she not been so greedy in borrowing the necklace. She questions how something as small as a necklace could have such a big impact on her

life saying " How little a thing it takes to destroy you or to save you," (Maupassant, 204).

The necklace both destroyed her and saved her. Even though she had to deal with ten long years of working to pay back the money, losing the necklace symbolizes Mathilde losing her greediness and gaining the knowledge that money does not lead to happiness. Works Cited Page De Maupassant, Guy. " The Necklace. " Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing. Roberts, Edgar V. , and Robert Zweig. 10th ed. Illinois: Pearson, 2012. 200-205. Print. Roberts, Edgar V. , and Robert Zweig. Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing. 10th ed. Illinois: Pearson, 2012. Print.