

Paraphrasing a passage



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Toni Morrison's review of *The Awakening* focuses on Africanist presence in Chopin's *Work*. He discusses some of the methods used in literature to portray Africanism, in the following paragraph The linguistic strategy of economy of stereotype is prominent in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. Edna has a "quadroon nurse" (7) who is looked upon as a "huge encumbrance" (7) by Edna's children because it is the nurse who performs the duties of making sure the children look presentable. Edna is described as "not a mother-woman" (8), and this description is helpful in understanding why Edna eventually must end her life. But the nurse is never described or designated as anything other than a "quadroon." This word signifies that the nurse is black, and therefore easily dismissed from Edna's world. But if the reader does not dismiss the nurse, it becomes obvious that "quadroon" tells the reader nothing about what the nurse looks like. Is she light? Is she dark? Fat? Skinny? She is described as meek; she follows the children "at the respectful distance which they required her to observe" (12). She knows her position in the world, and this contrasts sharply with Edna's realization of her own position, which is revealed a few lines after the nurse is seen following the children.

Paraphrase The methods employed by Kate Chopin, in *The Awakening*, include using language that implies the insignificance of black people in society. Chopin describes Edna's nurse with a term that implies she is black, but in an understated way, that draws little attention to the fact. In order to create the sense of unimportance in the nurse's role, there is little description about her role as a caretaker for Edna's children. The importance of the role of caring for the children is approached by focusing on Edna's apparent inability to take on a more nurturing and natural care taking role. It is the focus on Edna's shortcomings in fulfilling her role as a mother that

make her inner conflict seem so tumultuous that she considers suicide. The nurse is never described with physical features or personality characteristics that make her seem human. The one word description simply implies that she is black and is of no importance to Edna or her family. The single word does not offer any insights into the relationship the nurse has with Edna's children or with she and her husband. The reader might be left to wonder, what is this woman like? What does she look like? How does she interact with the children? However, the attention is drawn away from the nurse in the story, to focus on Edna's inner conflict. The nurse is briefly described as keeping a proper distance from the children when they require supervision, as she knows her station in life and does not dare cross certain boundaries. The nurse's position is also used to show how the boundaries of Edna's role are continually crossed and are often confused or uncertain. There is also quite a bit of fetishization going on regarding the Africanist presence in the form of the nurse. First, Edna decides to take up painting; "The quadroon sat for hours before Edna's palette, patient as a savage" (57). Morrison says fetishization is often linked to savagery and is useful in "evoking erotic fears . . . establishing fixed and major differences where difference does not exist or is minimal . . . Blood . . . is a pervasive fetish" (Morrison 15). Certainly the idea of noble, patient savagery is here, and early in the novel the narrator establishes the idea of difference between Edna and the "quadroon," even though Edna is presumably four quarters white, and the quadroon three. In addition to these characteristics of fetishization, there is another in the novel. The "erotic fears" surface as Edna's "purity" comes into question as her husband leaves her. Paraphrase with Direct Quote In the story, Edna exhibits an abnormal fixation on the nurse and her perception of the great

physical and intellectual differences, as exhibited by her focus on the nurse for a subject to paint. “ The quadron sat for hours before Edna’s palette, patient as a savage” (Morrison, 2009). Morrison explains that an abnormal fixation is often used to exaggerate physical differences, when they are relatively minor. He further explains that the nurse and Edna are not as different in color as one might believe, as the nurse has more of a white than black heritage. Another focus on exaggerating situations, by playing on deep emotions, occurs when Edna’s husband questions her fidelity, as he leaves. Within the work, Chopin uses two extremes to set the tone of the situation, depending on how it places Edna in the situation. When the description of the nurse is described in the first paragraph above, her character is downplayed, in order to place greater emphasis Edna’s character and her confusion about her roles as a wife and mother. In the second paragraph, the focus remains on Edna and the context in which she compares herself to the nurse, to exploit the difference in a work of art she may believe to be shocking to others. Edna is feeling oppressed and is beginning to exhibit behavior that rebels against what is considered the norm and expected behavior for women of her time. The first paragraph uses Africanism to explain the method Chopin uses to define Edna’s character, while Fetishization is used to create the scenario in the second paragraph. Both ignore the nurse as a human and minimize her importance in the story, while serving to direct focus on Edna’s conflicts within herself. References Chopin, K. (1900). *The Awakening*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 1970. Print. Morrison, T. (1992). *Playing in the Dark*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.southuniversity.libproxy.edmc.edu/docview/578501041?accountid=87314>.

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