

Name: _____ Class: _____

Emancipation: A Life Fable

By Kate Chopin
1963

Kate Chopin (1850-1904) was an American author of short stories and novels. In this short story, a narrator describes an animal's response when the door of its cage opens. As you read, take notes on how the animal's life in a cage compares to his life in the wild.

- [1] There was once an animal born into this world, and opening his eyes upon Life, he saw above and about him confining walls, and before him were bars of iron through which came air and light from without; this animal was born in a cage.

Here he grew, and throve¹ in strength and beauty under the care of an invisible protecting hand. Hungering, food was ever at hand. When he thirsted water was brought, and when he felt the need to rest, there was provided a bed of straw upon which to lie; and here he found it good, licking his handsome flanks,² to bask in the sun beam that he thought existed but to lighten his home.



"Untitled" by Clark Young is licensed under CC0

Awaking one day from his slothful³ rest, lo! the door of his cage stood open: accident had opened it. In the corner he crouched, wondering and fearfully. Then slowly did he approach the door, dreading the unaccustomed, and would have closed it, but for such a task his limbs were purposeless. So out the opening he thrust his head, to see the canopy of the sky grow broader, and the world waxing⁴ wider.

Back to his corner but not to rest, for the spell of the Unknown was over him, and again and again he goes to the open door, seeing each time more Light.

- [5] Then one time standing in the flood of it; a deep in-drawn breath — a bracing of strong limbs, and with a bound he was gone.

On he rushes, in his mad flight, heedless⁵ that he is wounding and tearing his sleek sides — seeing, smelling, touching of all things; even stopping to put his lips to the noxious⁶ pool, thinking it may be sweet.

1. to grow or develop well
2. the side of a person or animal's body
3. **Slothful (adjective):** lazy
4. to become larger or more visible
5. **Heedless (adjective):** taking no notice of something
6. **Noxious (adjective):** harmful or unpleasant

Hungering there is no food but such as he must seek and oftentimes fight for; and his limbs are weighted before he reaches the water that is good to his thirsting throat.

So does he live, seeking, finding, joying and suffering. The door which accident had opened is opened still, but the cage remains forever empty!

"Emancipation: A Life Fable" by Kate Chopin (1963) is in the public domain.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: As used in paragraph 1, what does the word “confining” suggest about the walls?
 - A. The walls are small.
 - B. The walls are limiting.
 - C. The walls are helpful.
 - D. The walls are reassuring.

2. PART B: Which detail from the fable best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. “There was once an animal born into this world” (Paragraph 1)
 - B. “opening his eyes upon Life” (Paragraph 1)
 - C. “through which came air and light” (Paragraph 1)
 - D. “this animal was born in a cage.” (Paragraph 1)

3. PART A: In paragraph 4, the author writes, “Back to his corner but not to rest, for the spell of the Unknown was over him, and again and again he goes to the open door, seeing each time more Light.” Which statement best describes how this sentence contributes the development of the plot?
 - A. The sentence introduces new details about the setting that allow the reader to predict what will happen in the future.
 - B. The sentence reflects the change in the animal’s awareness that eventually leads to action.
 - C. The sentence reveals background information that makes the problem clearer to the reader.
 - D. The sentence provides an example of the many challenges that the animal faces in his changing surroundings.

4. PART B: Which sentence from the passage contributes to the plot in a similar way?
 - A. “Here he grew, and throve in strength and beauty under care of an invisible protecting hand.” (Paragraph 2)
 - B. “In the corner he crouched, wondering and fearingly.” (Paragraph 3)
 - C. “Then slowly did he approach the door, dreading the unaccustomed, and would have closed it, but for such a task his limbs were purposeless.” (Paragraph 3)
 - D. “So out the opening he thrust his head, to see the canopy of the sky glow broader, and the world waxing wider.” (Paragraph 3)

5. PART A: Which statement expresses a theme in “Emancipation: A Life Fable”?
 - A. Independence is worth the possible hardships.
 - B. Security is necessary for happiness.
 - C. Confusion can lead to bad decisions.
 - D. Nature can comfort and shelter wounded animals.

6. PART B: Which sentence from the fable best supports the answer to Part A?
- A. "Here he grew, and throve in strength and beauty under care of an invisible protecting hand." (Paragraph 2)
 - B. "Awaking one day from his slothful rest, lo! The door of his cage stood open: accident had opened it." (Paragraph 3)
 - C. "Then one time standing in the flood of it; a deep in-drawn breath — a bracing of strong limbs, and with a bound he was gone." (Paragraph 5)
 - D. "So does he live, seeking, finding, joying and suffering." (Paragraph 8)

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. In the story, the narrator describes how well the animal is cared for in his cage. Despite this, he never returns to the cage. Why do you think this is? What does he have in the wild that he didn't have in his cage? Would you rather be free where there is more uncertainty or be cared for but less free?
2. Humans often keep animals in various forms of cages, whether they are pets, entertainment, or a source of food. Do you think there are times when it is not acceptable for animals to be raised in cages? If so, when? If animals are kept in cages, how should they be treated?