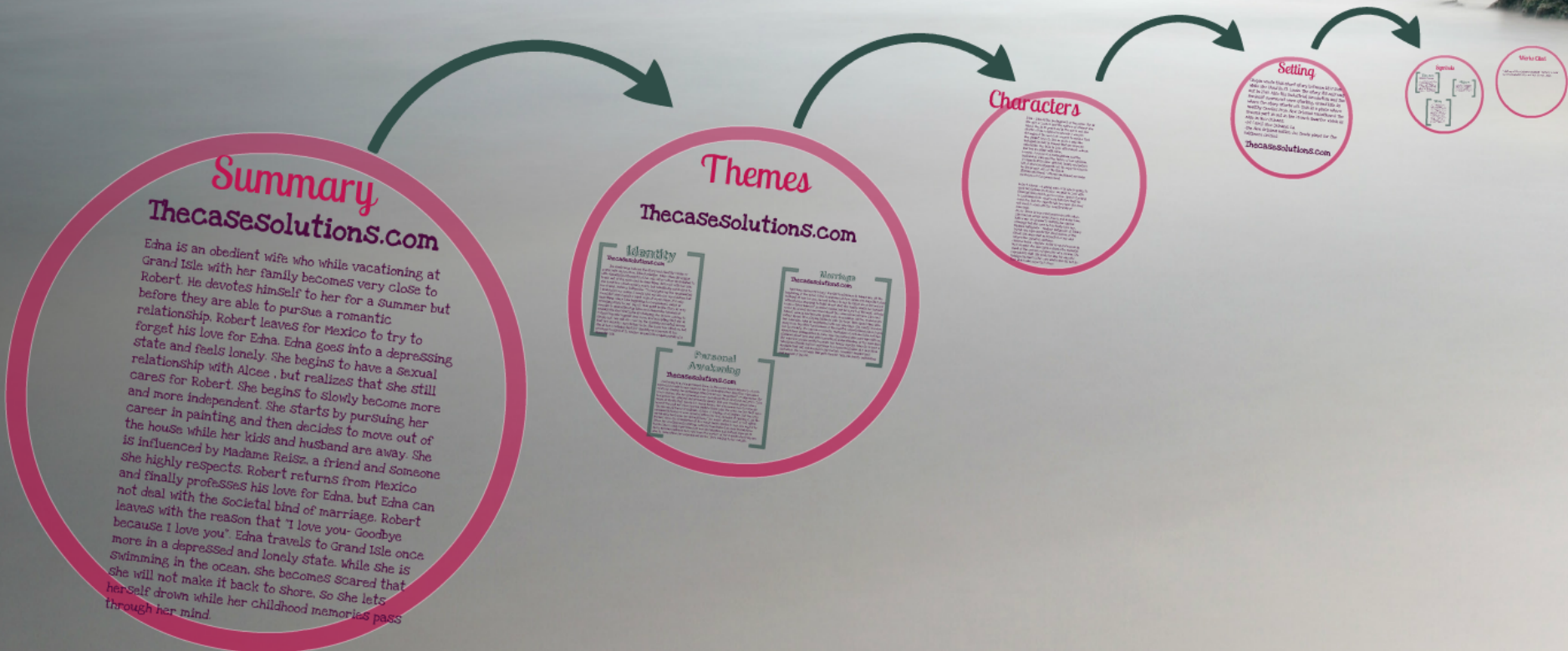


# Stelton (C): When Competition Awakens

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# Summary

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Edna is an obedient wife who while vacationing at Grand Isle with her family becomes very close to Robert. He devotes himself to her for a summer but before they are able to pursue a romantic relationship, Robert leaves for Mexico to try to forget his love for Edna. Edna goes into a depressing state and feels lonely. She begins to have a sexual relationship with Alcee, but realizes that she still cares for Robert. She begins to slowly become more and more independent. She starts by pursuing her career in painting and then decides to move out of the house while her kids and husband are away. She is influenced by Madame Reisz, a friend and someone she highly respects. Robert returns from Mexico and finally professes his love for Edna, but Edna cannot deal with the societal bind of marriage. Robert leaves with the reason that "I love you- Goodbye because I love you". Edna travels to Grand Isle once more in a depressed and lonely state. While she is swimming in the ocean, she becomes scared that she will not make it back to shore, so she lets herself drown while her childhood memories pass through her mind.

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The Awakening  
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# Themes

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## Identity

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The Awakening follows the story and identity crisis of young wife and mother, Edna Pontellier. Edna often struggles with dissatisfied thoughts of her role as a mother and wishes to break out of the norm and do something different with her life. She loves her children very much, but admittedly confesses to her friend, Madame Ratignolle, "I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it more clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me" (pg 62). This point in the story is very crucial in understanding Edna as a character because it reveals the fact that Edna is changing. She is now coming to respect herself a great deal more, and accepting that she is simply not, nor will she ever be, the socially accepted woman that her society expects her to be. She loves her children, but she is now realizing that her identity as a person is too precious to allow it to revolve around the requirements of a domestic life.

## Marriage

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Marriage serves as a huge barrier to pleasure in Edna's life. At the beginning of the novel, Edna is unaware of how easily she submits to her husband. It has become second nature to her to follow all of his orders without even stopping to think about what she really wants for herself. Léonce takes Edna for granted, seeing her as a part of his neat, orderly world. He seems unconcerned about the connection between Edna and Robert. Léonce and his wife speak only on occasion, and he would much rather spend time playing billiards with the boys than spend time with her. Likewise, Edna is unsatisfied with her marriage. She wants freedom away from the strict guidelines of the marital expectations placed upon her by society. She has had romantic fantasies of men and love but has always been disappointed in some way. She enters into marriage with no illusions about love and with a practical understanding of the marriage. She marries Léonce partly because her family objects. Edna does have a rebellious streak, but her marriage to Léonce Pontellier is a practical decision that will put an end to her foolish romantic dreams and fantasies. She must walk this path forever "idly, aimlessly, unthinking, and unguided" (pg 24).

## Personal Awakening

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Awakening is a very prevalent theme in the novel. Edna's discovery of self-expression leads to new ways for her to understand her long-time repressed emotions. During her awakening, Edna learns new "languages" of expression. The Creole women, who are generally more open about their emotions, influence Edna to express her opinions and sexuality openly. This new freedom gives Edna a sense of liberty that she hadn't known before. She also learns how to express herself through art when hearing Madame Reisz play the piano for the first time. "She saw no pictures of solitude, of hope, of longing, or of despair. But the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul, swaying it, lashing it, as the waves daily beat upon her splendid body." The music cries a sort of call within herself. Once she is awakened at how much music speaks to her, she begins to throw her emotions into painting. Lessons from Robert and her friend Alcée teach Edna to stop repressing her love and passion, and instead express it. Sadly, as Edna awakens more and more the number of her friends who truly are able to understand her expressions shrink. Thus, leading to her suicide.

# Identity

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# Setting

Chopin wrote this short story between 1887-1899 while she lived in St. Louis. The story itself was set in 1899. Also the Industrial Revolution and the feminist movement were starting. Grand Isle is where the story starts off. This is a place where wealthy Creoles from New Orleans vacationed. The second part is set in the French Quarter which is also in New Orleans.

-1°F (-18°C) New Orleans, La

-The New Orleans native Joe Dowie plays for the Baltimore Orioles.

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# The Sea

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The sea in *The Awakening* symbolizes empowerment and emotion as Edna learns to swim. Throughout time, the sea helps Edna learn that she has control over her own body. The sea helps Edna realize that she can be free and escape within the vast expanse of the water. It also functions as a lover to Edna as Chopin explains that the touch of the sea is "sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace." (Chopin 17) But Edna also drowns in the sea. This contradicts what the water symbolizes in the novel. As water usually associates with cleansing and baptism, this can be seen as a symbol of rebirth as Edna ends her life in the sea. The sea could also represent the individualism, glory, and strength that it carries with it.