Responding to Literature:
Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour”

Requirements:
- **Length:** 3-5 pages of double-spaced 12-point font
- **First Draft Due:** Monday, June 15. Bring three copies for an in-class workshop.
- **Final Draft Due:** Friday, June 19, at 9:30am.
- **Note:** This essay is due at the beginning of our final exam period (June 19, 9:30-11:20am). No late papers will be accepted; no revisions will be allowed.

Texts:
- Kate Chopin, “The Story of an Hour” (*Bedford Guide* 259-60)

Context:
In your last essay, you compared and contrasted two texts dealing with overlapping themes. This assignment will also require an intertextual analysis. By using the definition of feminism provided in the handout, you will test whether or not a feminist approach helps explain Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour,” and you will write a thesis-driven essay which takes a stand on whether or not Chopin’s story is a feminist story.

In class, we have been reading and discussing a handout on feminist approaches to literature. We have emphasized several main points from this handout:

- **Gender Differences:** A feminist approach to literature pays attention to gender differences and emphasizes how women experience the world differently from men. Feminist criticism explores the different social roles typically assigned to men and women.
- **Uniqueness of Female Perspective:** Feminist criticism accordingly emphasizes the uniqueness of female experience and regards female sensibilities and points of view as crucial material for analysis.
- **Political/Social Inequality of Men and Women:** Feminist approaches also tend to emphasize historical and present-day inequalities of power between men and women.
- **Feminism vs. Humanism:** Humanist approaches tend to downplay gender differences and to emphasize the universal quality of shared human experiences, regardless of gender. The assumption that men and women are pretty much the same is a humanist assumption. In contrast, feminist approaches emphasize gender differences and explore their social and historical implications. **Note:** In general, contemporary feminist critics maintain that men and women deserve the same
rights, but they do not maintain that the experiences of men and women are pretty much the same.

**Writing Task:**
Write a thesis-driven essay in response to the following question: Is Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour” a feminist story? Consider whether the central theme (or pattern of meaning) of this story is a feminist one. Does this story deliver a specifically feminist message? Support your generalizations by referring to specific evidence from the story.

**Pre-Writing Analysis:**
Before writing your response, be sure to perform the following steps of pre-writing analysis:

- Review the meaning of theme and other key terms for literary analysis. See “A Glossary of Terms for Literary Analysis” on pages 248-49 of *The Bedford Guide*.
- Review the meaning of feminist criticism. Use the hand-out from class to develop a definition of a feminist story, message, or theme.

**Strategies for Developing Your Argument:**
First, try to read “The Story of an Hour” through the lens provided by feminist criticism. Pay close attention to aspects of the story which may relate to gender issues and feminist themes. Try to read and think like a feminist would.

In the process, consider whether a feminist approach is useful in illuminating the themes of the story. Does a feminist reading enrich your understanding of the story? Or does the story offer resistance to being read in this way? Be sure to base your conclusion on a close reading of words and passages in the story. Whatever conclusion you draw, you need to back it up with supporting evidence (including quotations) from the text.

**Strategies for Organizing your Argument:**
Your essay should take the form of an argument that advances a central claim or thesis. This thesis should be summed up in a thesis statement that is clearly and directly delivered in the first paragraph of the essay. For this assignment, for example, a clear and direct thesis statement might resemble one of the following:

- Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour” is a feminist story.
- Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour” does not carry a specifically feminist message because it is primarily concerned not with the repression of women but with human oppression in general.

For such a thesis statement to be understandable to your reader, you will have to clarify what you mean by a feminist message or story. As in your last essay, you will need to define your key term(s) clearly at the outset of your essay. Otherwise, your argument will be vague and imprecise, and your reader won’t be able to understand your point.
In addition to containing a thesis statement and a brief definition of your key term(s), the first paragraph of your essay should also include an *essay map*—that is, a statement which “maps out” or lists (in the order in which the essay discusses them) the main supporting reasons or subtopics of the argument.

**Checklist for Revising:**

- **Title:** Does the essay begin with contain an interesting, original title?
- **Thesis:** Does the essay contain a thesis statement? Is the thesis or main claim stated directly and clearly in the first paragraph? Does the thesis directly address the question of the assignment? Does the essay clearly take a stand on whether or not “The Story of an Hour” carries a feminist message?
- **Essay map:** Is the thesis statement accompanied by an essay map—a brief statement of the supporting reasons in the order in which the essay discusses them?
- **Key terms:** Are key terms defined clearly in the first paragraph? Is it clear what the essay means when it refers to feminism or to feminist themes in literature?
- **Supporting Evidence:** Does the essay display supporting evidence (including quotations and paraphrases) to back up its interpretations? Does it support its claims with ample evidence from Chopin’s story?
- **Quotation:** Does the essay use direct quotation accurately? Does it place borrowed words and phrases within quotation marks, without introducing any changes, except for those indicated by an ellipsis (three spaced periods, like these . . .) or by square brackets [like these]? Does the essay set up a relevant context for its interpretation of quotations, so that it avoids dropped quotations? Does it avoid reading quotations out of context and misrepresenting their meaning in the context of the story? Does the essay use the proper MLA format for in-text citation? (See Appendix E1, page A-19.)
- **Paraphrase:** Does the essay paraphrase accurately, without misrepresenting or distorting its sources? Does it clearly attribute the ideas it paraphrases to their author(s)? Does it avoid plot summary, except to provide necessary contextual information?
- **Organization:** Is the argument organized logically, so that it sets forth its claims in an orderly manner? Does the essay define its key terms before deploying them in its analysis? Does the essay contain an essay map? Do the topic sentences of the body paragraphs correspond to the subtopics listed by the essay map?
- **Persuasiveness:** Is the argument convincing? Does it contain any errors in reasoning or judgment? Does it display sufficient supporting evidence? Does it address and refute opposing arguments (the counterargument)? Does it argue reasonably against opposing arguments and for its claim?
- **Present tense:** Does the essay use present-tense verbs when discussing literary characters and themes?
- **Grammar and mechanics:** Does the essay avoid obvious grammatical and mechanical errors (sentence fragments, comma splices, sentence fusions, problems with agreement, etc.)? Is the essay well edited and proofread?
- **Works Cited:** Does the essay contain a Works Cited page that properly uses the MLA format for each work cited? (See E2, page A-21.)