

# Desiree's Baby Answer Key

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## “*Désirée’s Baby*” by Kate Chopin

### Reading Comprehension Quiz

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The setting of the narrative is:
- A. Alabama
  - B. Georgia
  - C. Arkansas
  - D. Louisiana
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The Valmonde family adopted Désirée:
- A. After she had been left and found on the side of a road
  - B. After her birth parents died in a car accident
  - C. After she had already been placed in several foster homes
  - D. After she had been kicked out of her parents' house
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. When Armand first marries Désirée, he says what does not matter?
- A. Age
  - B. Heritage
  - C. Religious differences
  - D. Money
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. How does Madame Valmonde react to seeing Désirée's baby?
- A. She is shocked by its appearance
  - B. She is concerned that Désirée is unprepared for motherhood
  - C. She is concerned that Armand is an unfit father
  - D. She is overcome by happiness and sobs
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. In the short time following the baby's birth, Désirée notes that Armand's attitude toward the slaves has changed. How so?
- A. He wants to buy them their freedom
  - B. He is treating them better
  - C. He is becoming more impatient toward them
  - D. He is becoming more physically aggressive toward them
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Over time, what else does Désirée notice?
- A. Armand is becoming more insincere in his compliments
  - B. Armand stays out for several nights at a time
  - C. Strange visitors are coming to the plantation
  - D. Armand furiously stares at the baby for long periods

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**Desiree's Baby** is a poignant short story by Kate Chopin that delves into themes of race, identity, and societal expectations in the antebellum South. The narrative revolves around Desiree, a woman of unknown heritage who falls in love with Armand Aubigny, a wealthy plantation owner. Their seemingly idyllic life takes a dark turn when the appearance of their child reveals unsettling truths about identity and acceptance. This article explores the key elements of the story, its themes, characters, and some critical analysis of its implications.

## Summary of the Plot

Desiree is found as a baby by Monsieur Valmonde, who raises her as his own daughter. She grows up on

his plantation and eventually marries Armand, who is initially captivated by her beauty and innocence. They have a child together, but as the child grows, it becomes evident that he has African features. This revelation sends Armand into a rage, leading him to reject Desiree and their child, believing that Desiree must be of mixed race.

In a desperate bid to prove her worth and identity, Desiree confronts Armand, but he is unmoved by her pleas. Feeling utterly alone and rejected, Desiree takes her child and walks into the bayou, presumably to her death. The story concludes with a shocking twist that reveals Armand's own heritage, unraveling the very foundation of his prejudices.

## **Characters**

The story is rich with character development that highlights the complexities of identity and societal norms.

### **Desiree**

Desiree is the central character whose journey reflects the struggles of identity and acceptance. Her ambiguous racial background plays a crucial role in the narrative. Raised in a loving home, her sense of self is shattered when societal perceptions of race and heritage come into play.

### **Armand Aubigny**

Armand is portrayed as a proud and passionate man, initially depicted as loving and devoted to Desiree. However, his character undergoes a drastic transformation upon the realization of his child's appearance. His deep-seated racism and pride lead him to cruelly reject Desiree and their child, showcasing the destructive nature of societal expectations and personal insecurities.

### **Monsieur Valmonde**

Monsieur Valmonde, Desiree's adoptive father, embodies a more progressive attitude towards race. His unconditional love for Desiree suggests a contrast to Armand's rigid beliefs. Valmonde's character serves as a reminder of the alternatives to the prevailing racial ideologies of the time.

# Themes

Kate Chopin's "Desiree's Baby" explores several profound themes that resonate with contemporary issues of identity, race, and societal norms.

## Race and Identity

The story's exploration of race and identity is central to its impact. Desiree's unknown heritage becomes a focal point for the tragedy that ensues. The stigma associated with mixed-race individuals underscores the destructive nature of racism. Armand's denial of his own heritage reveals the hypocrisy that often accompanies prejudiced beliefs, suggesting that the fear of others may stem from one's insecurities.

## Love and Rejection

The love between Desiree and Armand is initially portrayed as pure and passionate but quickly deteriorates into rejection and cruelty. This transition highlights the fragility of love when tested by societal pressures and personal insecurities. Desiree's unconditional love for her child stands in stark contrast to Armand's rejection, showcasing the varying dimensions of love.

## The Role of Women

Desiree's ultimate fate reflects the limited agency women had in the 19th-century South. Her identity and worth are tied to her husband's perception of her, illustrating how women often faced societal oppression through their relationships. The story critiques the patriarchal structures that dictate women's lives and choices.

## Literary Devices

Chopin employs various literary devices to enhance the narrative, making it a rich text for analysis.

## Symbolism

- The Bayou: The bayou symbolizes both a place of refuge and despair. Desiree's final act of walking into the bayou represents her escape from a world that has rejected her.

- The Child: The child embodies the societal fears surrounding race and identity. His appearance serves as a catalyst for the story's tragic events.

## **Ironic Twist Ending**

The story culminates in a dramatic irony that adds depth to its message. The revelation of Armand's heritage serves as a powerful critique of racism, suggesting that prejudice often blinds individuals to their own realities. This twist forces readers to reconsider their perceptions of identity and the arbitrary nature of societal classifications.

## **Critical Analysis**

"Desiree's Baby" remains a relevant text in discussions of race, identity, and gender. The story's critique of societal norms challenges readers to reflect on the implications of heritage and the often arbitrary nature of racial classifications.

## **Relevance to Contemporary Issues**

Despite being set in the 19th century, the themes of "Desiree's Baby" resonate with modern audiences. Issues of racial identity, privilege, and systemic racism persist today, making the story a timeless exploration of human experience. The narrative serves as a reminder of the destructive power of prejudice and the importance of embracing diversity.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Kate Chopin's "Desiree's Baby" is a profound exploration of race, identity, and the societal constructs that shape our lives. Through the tragic story of Desiree and Armand, Chopin critiques the rigid norms of her time, offering insights that remain relevant today. The narrative's rich symbolism, complex characters, and ironic twist compel readers to examine the implications of race and identity in their own lives. As we reflect on Desiree's journey, we are reminded of the enduring struggle for acceptance and the need for a more inclusive understanding of identity.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

## **What is the central theme of 'Desiree's Baby'?**

The central theme of 'Desiree's Baby' is racism and the complexities of identity, particularly in the context of mixed-race individuals and societal perceptions.

## **How does the story explore the concept of motherhood?**

The story explores motherhood through Desiree's unconditional love for her child, contrasting it with Armand's conditional love based on racial purity and societal expectations.

## **What role does setting play in 'Desiree's Baby'?**

The setting of antebellum Louisiana serves as a backdrop that highlights the racial dynamics and social hierarchies of the time, influencing the characters' decisions and fates.

## **What is the significance of Desiree's unknown heritage?**

Desiree's unknown heritage symbolizes the ambiguity of racial identity and the arbitrary nature of societal classifications based on race.

## **How does Armand's attitude change throughout the story?**

Armand's attitude shifts from pride and love for his family to anger and rejection towards Desiree and their child, highlighting his deep-seated racism and insecurity.

## **What is the climax of 'Desiree's Baby'?**

The climax occurs when Desiree confronts Armand about the child's racial identity, leading to her ultimate decision to leave, which reveals the destructive impact of his prejudices.

## **What is the irony present in the ending of 'Desiree's Baby'?**

The irony lies in the fact that Armand, who rejects Desiree and their child for being part Black, discovers through a letter that he is actually of mixed race himself, thus undermining his own beliefs.

## **How does Chopin depict gender roles in the story?**

Chopin depicts traditional gender roles by showing Desiree as a passive character whose fate is controlled by the men around her, particularly Armand, reflecting the limited agency of women in that era.

## **What literary devices are prominent in 'Desiree's Baby'?**

Prominent literary devices include symbolism, particularly with the baby as a representation of racial identity, and irony, especially in the revelations about Armand's heritage.

## How does the story reflect historical attitudes toward race?

The story reflects historical attitudes toward race by illustrating the harsh realities of racial discrimination, social hierarchy, and the lengths individuals would go to maintain societal status.

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