I'm not a robot

The Lady or the Tiger? by Frank R. Stockton first appeared in The Century Magazine in 1882. This captivating story presents a unique form of justice.The Lady or the Tiger? by Frank R. Stockton first appeared in The Century Magazine in 1882. This captivating story presents a unique form of justice a young man accused of a crime must choose
between two doors. Behind one, a ferocious tiger awaits. Behind the other, a beautiful lady stands ready to be his bride. The tales brilliance lies in its ambiguous ending, where the reader must decide the young mans fate. The storys exploration of love, justice, and the unpredictable nature of choice has inspired debates and analysis for over a century,
making it a true classic of American literature.A semi-barbaric king, fascinated by spectacle, designs a unique system of justice (poetic justice). An accused criminal faces two identical doors in his grand arena.Behind one door, a vicious tiger awaits, ready to punish the guilty (a hungry tiger, the fiercest and most cruel that could be procured).Behind
the other, a carefully selected maiden stands, a reward for the innocent (the most suitable to his years and station).The kings own passionate daughter falls for a handsome young man of lower status, a grave offense in their society.The king, unwavering in his ideals, casts the lover into prison and sets a date for his trial in the arena.The princess,
consumed by love and jealousy, refuses to be a passive observer. Using her power and resources, she discovers the secret of the doors.She learns which door conceals the tiger and which holds a beautiful maiden, a rival for her lovers affection (one of the fairest and loveliest of the damsels of the court).On the day of the trial, the young man looks to
the princess, knowing she has the power to save or condemn him (his eye met hers as she sat there, paler and whiter than anyone).With a subtle gesture, the princess guides his choice (She raised her hand, and made a slight, quick movement toward the right.).The young man, trusting the woman he loves, confidently opens the indicated door.The
story abruptly ends, leaving the reader with the burning question: Did he meet the lady or the tiger?The reader must grapple with the princesss tortured heart. Would she choose to save the man she loves but see him married to another, or would her jealousy propel him towards a gruesome death? The story offers no easy answers.Allusion: A
reference to a well-known person, place, or thing in history, literature, or culture. In The Lady or the Tiger?, an allusion is made to the barbaric traditions of ancient cultures.Ambiguity: The use of language that has multiple possible meanings, leading to uncertainty or confusion. The ending of The Lady or the Tiger? is ambiguous, leaving the reader to
decide what happens next.Characterization: The process of creating and developing a character in a story. The characters in The Lady or the Tiger? are well-developed and distinct, with the princess being a particularly complex character.Conflict: The struggle between opposing forces that drives a storys plot. The central conflict in The Lady or the
Tiger? is the young mans trial and the dilemma of whether to choose the door with the lady or the tiger.Flashback: A narrative device that interrupts the chronological sequence of events to present an earlier scene. The Lady or the Tiger? includes a brief flashback to the trial of another man accused of a crime.Foreshadowing: The use of hints or clues
in the narrative to suggest what will happen later. The princesss jealous and possessive nature foreshadows the possibility that she may have chosen the door with the tiger.Hyperbole: The use of exaggerated language to create emphasis or effect. The description of the young mans love for the princess as a monstrous passion is an example of
hyperbole.Imagery: The use of descriptive language to create mental images or sensory experiences for the reader. The descriptions of the young mans trial and the arena are rich in sensory imagery.Irony: The use of language or situations that are contrary to what is expected or intended. The irony of The Lady or the Tiger? lies in the fact that the
young mans fate depends entirely on chance, rather than the justice he expects.Metaphor: A figure of speech that describes something as if it were something else. The description of the princesss heart as a wild animal is a metaphor.Personification: A figure of speech in which an inanimate object or abstract idea is given human qualities. The
description of the arena as a monster that the young man must face is an example of personification.Point of view: The perspective from which a story is told. The Lady or the Tiger? is told from a third-person omniscient point of view, allowing the reader access to the thoughts and feelings of multiple characters.Setting: The time and place in which a
story takes place. The setting of The Lady or the Tiger? is a kingdom with a unique and unusual justice system.Symbolism: The use of objects or images to represent or suggest something else. The doors in The Lady or the Tiger? are symbolic of the choice between love and death.Theme: The underlying message or meaning conveyed by a story.
Themes in The Lady or the Tiger? include the power of choice, the consequences of jealousy, and the limitations of justice.Exuberant, with a mix of barbaric cruelty and touches of refinement (semi-barbaric king, whose ideaswere still large, florid, and untrammeled).A strong believer in his own sense of justice and fairness (an authority so irresistible
that, at his will, he turned his varied fancies into facts).Obsessed with spectacle and the entertainment of his subjects (But even here the exuberant and barbaric fancy asserted itself).Unwavering in his adherence to the arena system, even when it affects his own family.Possesses her fathers passionate nature (as blooming as his most florid fancies,
and with a soul as fervent and imperious as his own).Deeply in love with the young man, defying social norms (she loved him with an ardor that had enough of barbarism in it to make it exceedingly warm and strong).Driven, resourceful, willing to manipulate the system to influence the outcome (she had possessed herself of the secret of the
doors).Torn between her love, a desire for revenge, and a fierce jealousy the central conflict of her character.Brave and handsome (handsome and brave to a degree unsurpassed in all this kingdom).Deeply in love with the princess, willing to risk his life for this forbidden relationship.Implicitly trusts the princess, even to the point of accepting his own
potential doom.The Tiger: A symbol of brutality, punishment, and the potential for gruesome violence.The Lady: A potential bride, representing a socially acceptable outcome. However, she is also the object of the princesss jealousy and remains largely undeveloped.The People: The masses who are entertained by the arenas blend of justice and
spectacle, highlighting the societal acceptance of the kings systeThemeExplanationReferences from the StoryFate vs. Choice (Determinism vs. Free Will)The story questions whether our lives are controlled by external forces or our own decisions.* The kings arena system seemingly removes personal choice, forcing the accused to rely on chance. (it
was the duty and the privilege of the person on trial to walk directly to these doors and open one of them.) * However, the princesss actions and the young mans trust exemplify the power of human will to influence even seemingly predetermined situations.Justice vs. SpectacleThe line between serving justice and indulging in barbaric entertainment is
blurred.* The king believes his system is perfectly fair and just. (Its perfect fairness is obvious.) * Yet, the story emphasizes the publics enthrallment with the suspense and potential violence of the arena. (This element of uncertainty lent an interest to the occasion)Love vs. JealousyThe princess experiences a profound internal conflict between her
passionate love and a burning jealousy.* Her love for the young man is described as ardent and defying social boundaries. * Yet, the potential of seeing him with another woman drives her to a potentially destructive act, highlighting the dark side of love.Civilization vs. BarbarismThe story explores the tension between societal refinement and the
underlying brutality of human nature.* The king is described as semi-barbaric, showcasing a veneer of civilization over his savage methods. * The crowds eager anticipation of bloodshed and the princesss violent impulses further illustrate the thin line between order and chaos.Descriptive language and vivid imagery: Stockton paints vivid pictures for
the reader, bringing the arena, the king, the princess, and the young man to life through his words.Suspenseful narrative structure: The story builds suspense from beginning to end, with the reader eagerly awaiting the accused mans decision and its dramatic consequences.Third-person omniscient point of view: Stockton gives the reader access to
the internal thoughts and feelings of the king, the princess, and even the accused, creating a layered and multi-dimensional experience.Irony and ambiguity: The story is laced with irony, especially with its ending that intentionally leaves the reader hanging. This open ambiguity forces the reader to grapple with their own internal answers.Engaging,
imaginative, and thought-provoking: The writing style successfully invites the reader to contemplate not only the storys events but deeper questions about love, jealousy, justice, and the power of choice.Reader-Response Theory: The reader-response theory focuses on the role of the reader in interpreting a text. In The Lady or the Tiger? the reader is
left to decide the outcome of the story, which allows for a range of interpretations and responses.Psychological Criticism: Psychological criticism focuses on the psychological motivations and behavior of the characters in a story. In The Lady or the Tiger?, the princesss jealousy and the kings desire for control are examples of how psychological factors
influence their actions and decisions.Structuralism: Structuralism is a literary theory that emphasizes the underlying structures of a text. In The Lady or the Tiger?, the storys structure is crucial to its meaning, with the narrative structure of the story mirroring the choice the accused man must make between the two doors.Feminist Criticism:
Feminist criticism examines the representation of women in literature and seeks to uncover gender-based inequalities and biases. In The Lady or the Tiger?, the princesss agency is limited by her fathers patriarchal rule, and the story can be read as a critique of the limitations placed on women in a patriarchal society.Deconstructionism:
Deconstructionism is a literary theory that examines how the meaning of a text is constructed and deconstructed through language. In The Lady or the Tiger?, the ambiguity of the ending allows for multiple interpretations, highlighting the idea that meaning is not fixed or stable, but rather constantly in flux.Postcolonial Criticism: Postcolonial
criticism examines the relationship between literature and the legacy of colonialism. In The Lady or the Tiger?, the story can be read as an allegory for the imperialist mindset of Western colonial powers, with the king representing the colonizer and the accused man representing the colonized.TopicEssay QuestionThesis Statement ExamplePower and
JusticeDoes the kings system of justice achieve its intended purpose?The kings method of dispensing justice is deeply flawed, demonstrating how arbitrary power can warp the very concept of fairness.Morality and ChoiceIs the princesss decision morally defensible, regardless of which door she chose?The princesss decision reveals her flawed moral
compass; her self-centered nature undermines any argument justifying her actions.Love and JealousyHow does jealousy shape the princesss actions and the outcome of the story?The destructive power of the princesss jealousy overrules her love for the young man, leading to his potential demise.Ambiguity and InterpretationWhy is the ambiguous
ending so effective, and how does it change the readers experience?Stocktons ambiguous ending cleverly shifts the responsibility of determining the storys resolution to the reader, forcing a deeper engagement with its central themes.What is the significance of the princess in The Lady or the Tiger? and how does her character challenge traditional
gender roles?The princess in The Lady or the Tiger? is a significant character as she holds the power to determine the accused mans fate. Her character challenges traditional gender roles by displaying agency and making a difficult decision that ultimately shapes the storys outcome. In a society where women are expected to be submissive and
passive, the princess stands out as a strong and independent character who is not afraid to take matters into her own hands. Her decision to send the accused man to either the tiger or the lady demonstrates her power and influence in a society where women are often marginalized. The princesss character highlights the importance of challenging
gender norms and expectations in order to break free from societal constraints.What is the role of choice in The Lady or the Tiger??The role of choice in The Lady or the Tiger? is a commentary on the complexities of human nature and the consequences of making difficult decisions. The accused man is faced with a life or death situation, and his
choice ultimately determines his fate. However, the story suggests that even the princesss choice is not easy, as she must decide between her love for the accused man and her jealousy towards the lady. The story highlights the unpredictable and often unfair nature of choice, and how it can shape our lives in unexpected ways. It also raises questions
about morality and the consequences of our actions, as the outcome of the story hinges on the choices made by the characters.How does the structure of the story mirror the choice the accused man must make between the two doors?The structure of The Lady or the Tiger? mirrors the choice the accused man must make between the two doors,
highlighting the theme of the unpredictable and complex nature of choice. The story is divided into two distinct parts, with the first part describing the accused mans trial and the second part focusing on the princesss decision. The structure creates a sense of tension and uncertainty as the reader is left to wonder what lies behind each door. The use
of suspense and ambiguity in the storys structure reflects the difficult and often unpredictable nature of the choices we must make in life. The ending, which leaves the reader to decide the outcome, further emphasizes the complexity of choice and the uncertainty of its consequences.What is the significance of the ending of The Lady or the Tiger? and
how does it contribute to the storys overall meaning?The ambiguous ending of The Lady or the Tiger? contributes to the storys overall meaning by highlighting the complexity of human nature and the role of choice in shaping our lives. The reader is left to decide the outcome of the story, with no clear answer provided. This lack of resolution reflects
the unpredictable and often unfair nature of choice, and how it can shape our lives in unexpected ways. The ending also raises questions about the morality of the characters actions and the consequences of their choices. Ultimately, the story suggests that life is full of difficult choices and uncertain outcomes, and it is up to each individual to navigate
these challenges with wisdom and courage.The Most Dangerous Game by Richard Connell: Both stories present a central character confronting a high-stakes, life-or-death scenario governed by chance and external forces. While Stockton focuses on a perversion of justice, Connells work explores the dynamics of predator and prey.The Necklace by Guy
de Maupassant: This short story shares the theme of an ambiguous, unresolved ending with Stocktons work. Both explore desire, unforeseen consequences, and the ironic twists of fate that can shape individuals lives.The Discourager of Hesitancy by Frank R. Stockton: As a continuation of The Lady or the Tiger?, this story offers further insight into
the characters and world of the original. It provides added layers of commentary on the themes presented.The Lottery by Shirley Jackson: Both stories employ ambiguity to expose the potential darkness within seemingly innocuous traditions. They provoke critical thought about social conformity and the potential cruelty present within established
systems.Sophies Choice by William Styron: Although a novel, this work resonates with The Lady or the Tiger? in its central focus on a devastating moral dilemma. Like Stocktons princess, Sophie faces an unthinkable choice, forcing the reader to confront the complexities of human decision-making under harrowing circumstances.Bander, Elaine.
Stocktons The Lady, or the Tiger? An Unanswerable Question. Short Story Criticism, edited by Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau, vol. 105, Gale, 2008, p. 223.Gilead, Sarah L. Magic and Skepticism in The Lady, or the Tiger?' The Stocktonian, vol. 2, no. 4, 1983, pp. 7-8.Marshall, Donald G. Justice in The Lady, or the Tiger? The
Stocktonian, vol. 8, no. 3, 1989, pp. 4-5.Cummins, June. The Lady Or the Tiger? and Other Logic Puzzles: Including a Mathematical Analysis. Prometheus Books, 1988.Johnson, Gerald W. The Lady, or the Tiger? Frank R. Stockton: A Critical Biography. Benjamin Franklin, 1980, pp. 99-107. Short Fiction Frank R. Stockton Frank Stocktons 1882 short
story The Lady, or the Tiger? is a whimsical fairy tale about the dangers of choice and consequence. It involves a faithful suitor, a jealous princess, and a vengeful king. After the king learns of the love affair between the princess and the suitor, a man of lower birth, the king throws the young man into his arenaa great colosseum where he punishes the
kingdoms criminals. The criminal on trial must open one of the two doors in the arena: behind one is a tiger, who will devour him; behind the other is a beautiful maiden, to whom he will be married. For the trial of the lover, however, the king has chosen a lady of whom the princess is extremely jealous. Stockton places the princess at the center of her
lovers fate: Will she send him to his death or to a life married to a woman she hates? After discovering which door holds the tiger and which holds the lady, the princess directs her lover to one of the doors. Stockton ends the narrative before revealing what was behind the chosen door, placing the fate of the young man on the imagination of the
reader, not the princess. Stockton's "The Lady, or the Tiger?" is set in a kingdom ruled by a "semi-barbaric" king who is a fanciful and unpredictable man. The king has dreamt up a justice system that is based entirely on chance. He has built a public arena where men accused of a crime must choose one of two doors. Behind one of the doors is a lady;
behind the other is a tiger. If the prisoner chooses the door with the tiger, he is assumed to be guilty, and he will be eaten in front of the entire kingdom. On the other hand, if he chooses the door with the lady, he is presumed innocent, and he marries the lady right there on the spot. The king's beautiful daughter has a personality that is very similar
to his. Unbeknownst to him, she falls in love with a courtier, who is far below her in status. When the king finds out about this relationship, he is enraged. He puts the courtier on trial and will let his system of "poetic justice" decide the youth's fate. He searches his kingdom for the most ferocious tiger and the most beautiful lady. On the day of the
courtier's trial, everyone in the kingdom gathers in the amphitheater. When the courtier steps into the amphitheater, he bows to the king but his eyes are on the princess. He knows the princess's character and knows that she would have gone to great lengths to know what each door is concealing. The princess also knows the identity of the lady
hiding behind the door: it is a beautiful lady of whom the princess is quite jealous. The courtier and the princess's eyes meet. He asks her with a glance which door he should choose. The princess makes a miniature gesture towards the door on the right. The courtier marches forward and chooses that door without hesitation. We are not told what was
behind the door that the princess chose for her former lover. Did she choose to send him to death in order to avoid giving him away to another? Or, in order to spare her lover's life, did she seal her own heartbreak to watch the one she loves marry another? In the end, the question is posed to the reader: what do you think came out of that door? The
lady, or the tiger? By Dr Oliver Tearle (Loughborough University)The Lady, or the Tiger? is a widely studied short story by the American writer Frank R. Stockton (1834-1902). This classic short story, which was first published in The Century magazine in 1882, began life as a story Stockton told at a party; he published it when it received a strong
response from his friends.In The Lady, or the Tiger?, we are presented with an ancient system of justice whereby a suspected criminal has to choose one of two doors. Behind one is a lady, whom he will marry; behind the other is a tiger, which will devour him. Plot summarySome time in the past, a semi-barbaric king has an arena built, in which
justice is administered. Any man arrested on suspicion of committing a crime has to choose one of two doors in the amphitheatre, without knowing what is concealed behind the two doors. All he knows is that behind one door is a lady, and behind the other door, a tiger. Behind one door is a lady, who has been handpicked from the population as a
suitable bride for the man. If he chooses this door, he will be married to the lady immediately in a wedding ceremony performed in front of the crowd. Even if he already has a wife, he must marry this new bride and be with her.The alternative is far worse. For behind the other door is a tiger, which if he chooses this door will leap upon him and devour
him in front of the audience. This is the kings way of serving justice in his realm: effectively, he places responsibility for their fate into the criminals own hands, although of course it is purely a matter of chance as to which prize they get. One day, the king learns that his daughter, the princess, has fallen in love with a young courtier. He is horrified
that a princess could have been led astray by a commoner like this, and he has the young man arrested. It is announced that he will face his justice before the whole kingdom, in the arena, and men are immediately dispatched to find a suitable potential bride for him. Meanwhile, the fiercest tiger in the whole land is sought out.The princess, who loves
the young man, is at the arena on the day of her lovers sentencing. When the young man sees the princess, he can tell that she has done as he expected her to do: that she has used money and her powerful status at court to discover which door hides the lady and which the tiger. When he makes eye contact with her, he asks her, Which?, and she
gestures to her right. So she has signalled which door he should choose. But at this point, the third-person narrator of the story tells us that he cannot tell us whether the princess directed her lover to choose the lady door or the tiger door. He tells us, though, that she knows the identity of the lady concealed behind one of the doors, and its a beautiful
lady at court who is clearly attracted to the young man; whats more, the princess has suspected for a while that her lover likes this lady, too.So, did she help him to escape the fate of the tigers jaws, and effectively give the man she loves to another woman, with whom he will probably be perfectly happy? Or did her jealousy get the better of her, and
she gestured to the door behind which the tiger waits to devour him? The narrator leaves this question unanswered, instead encouraging us to think for ourselves about which decision the princess would have made. AnalysisIn many ways, The Lady, or the Tiger? resembles a fable or fairy tale, and indeed the storys author, Frank R. Stockton, wrote a
number of fairy tales for children. But this is a fairy tale with a difference, since Stockton concludes the story without providing us with the final denouement. We are left wondering what the fate of the young man was: did he marry a beautiful woman (albeit not the princess), or was he eaten alive by a tiger? But in subverting the readers expectations
on the final page, Stockton is doing more than providing a nice talking-point for dinner-party conversations (to hark back to the supposed origins of the story). Instead, he is tacitly inviting us to pause and consider narrative conventions by taking a step back from the story itself and acknowledging that it is just that: story, narrative, fiction.The
princess, king, and youth who appear in the story never existed, and are merely products of an authors imagination. So, too, then, are their fates, including the unspecified fate of the youth who loved the princess. Most stories are what the French literary theorist Roland Barthes calls readerly texts: they provide the reader with everything he or she
needs to understand the story, and the reader can passively sit back and simply enjoy being entertained. By contrast, writerly texts to use Barthes term are those fictions which engage the reader more actively in the events of the story or novel. In a writerly text, the reader will have to work harder to make sense of the narrative. For the most part,
critics apply Barthes term writerly to the works of those authors who deliberately make us work hard from page one: Samuel Beckett, James Joyce, and other modernists.What is curious about The Lady, or the Tiger? is that it begins, in Barthesian terms, as a readerly text, but then at the last moment Stockton subverts our readerly expectations and
the story becomes a writerly text, throwing the onus on us to determine what we think happened to the young man. If Stockton had simply told us that what door the man had opened, we would have been told what the princes had decided to do. But by withholding this crucial piece of narrative information from us, Stockton makes us examine the
princesss mental and emotional state more closely, based on the information we have been given, in order to deduce what she would be most likely to have done.Of course, we still cannot answer the question posed in the storys title, The Lady, or the Tiger?, for certain (and note how even the question mark in the story primes us for a more active role
than we might otherwise be used to when reading, or even analysing, a short story). This is what makes the story such a perennial favourite in classrooms: readers are unlikely to reach a consensus on what the princess decided to do.But in withholding this information, Stockton created, in The Lady, or the Tiger?, a forerunner to many twentieth-
century modernist stories which would be similarly open-ended and ambiguous. Perhaps even without fully realising it himself, Stockton toppled the author from his godlike pedestal and made us, the readers of his story, the final authors of the storys conclusion. In this, too, he anticipates Barthes, whose 1960s essay The Death of the Author would
argue that the godlike authority of the author must be resisted in favour of the birth of the reader. Subscribe to get the latest posts sent to your email. Share copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The
licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution You must give appropriate credit , provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made . You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. ShareAlike If you remix, transform, or build
upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original. No additional restrictions You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits. You do not have to comply with the license for elements of the material in the public domain or where
your use is permitted by an applicable exception or limitation . No warranties are given. The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. Frank R. Stocktons short story "The Lady, or the Tiger?" has won critical
acclaim for its captivating narration and speculative suspense at the end. Penlighten helps you understand the story better by giving a summary and further analysis on it. Mystery Unraveled!Frank R. Stockton, an American writer and humorist was discouraged from taking up a career in writing by his father despite the fact that besides being a
Methodist minister, he was a writer himself. Until 1860, Stockton worked as a wood engraver and after his fathers death took to writing again. 1867 saw Stocktons launch as a writer in his brothers newspaper and the publication of his very first fairy tale, Ting-a-ling.The Lady, or the Tiger?, a short-story penned by Frank R. Stockton (1834-1902), was
published in The Century Magazine in 1882. It was included as the title story in Stocktons 1884 collection of twelve stories. This intriguing story describes the brutal ways of a half-barbaric king in imputing justice, and the struggle of a princess to free her lover from awaiting doom. The story takes the readers by surprise with a speculative end,
leaving it to them to decide the outcome. Let us find out more about the storyAnalysis: The Lady, or the Tiger?Plot Summary The story is narrated in the third person addressing the readers directly. The story is set in the ancient times. It begins with the narrator introducing a semi-barbaric king, semi-barbaric because he has a civilized Latin influence
on his life. However, he unleashes his barbaric side by exercising an unusual system of justice on his people when found guilty of any crime. The accused is placed in an arena all by himself, which has two doors. The accused is faced with the task of choosing one of the doors which would lead him to freedom. The other, of course, would be sure death.
The door that leads to freedom has a maiden sitting behind it, whom the accused would have to marry right away leaving no room for his opinion. Whereas, the other door has a ferocious, hungry tiger behind it. The doors are identical, and this is what gives the story a nail-biting finish. This system of justice enthralled the audience as the fate of the
accused was in his own hands. They loved the experience of sitting at the edge of their chairs to witness the outcomefreedom or death. The story proceeds further with an interesting twist to it where the kings daughterthe princessfalls in love with a commoner. When the king discovers this affair, he turns livid and summons his soldiers to arrest the
commoner and put him behind bars. He calls for the game to begin. In the meanwhile, he sends out his soldiers to find the most ferocious and dangerous man-eating tiger to be put behind one of the doors. The softer side of him chooses one of the most beautiful maidens for the young man to be put behind the other door.The princess being madly in
love with her lover, plots to free him. She secretly, with power and money, finds the door to freedom and the maiden who would be sitting behind it. Unfortunately for her, the maiden is also in love with the commoner, and the princess detests her for that. Finally, on the day of the trial, she sits along with her fatherthe kingin the arena to witness the
final outcome. As the accused lover is presented before the king, he looks up to her, and she signals with her right hand indicating that he should take the right door. As the young lover moves forward to open it, the narrator abruptly stops the story. Thus, leaving it to the readers to decide on the conclusionLiberty or Doom.Ending The story ends in a
suspense, and the narrator sets out the princesss dilemma. The princess was aware that she will be asked for help by her lover. The princess loved the commoner; however, she had a barbaric streak in her. She had imagined the horror of the tiger eating her lover, and on the other hand, she was tormented by the thought of her lover marrying
someone else whom she hated. In any case, the princess had lost her lover. However, it was in her power to decide to whom she would lose her lover. The narrator describes the princesss anguish and dilemma from the time her lover was cast into prison. The endless nights of sleeplessness, the will and power that she exudes to free her lover, the
agony of losing him to another woman, and the fear of seeing her lover being devoured by a tiger the choice was hers. She knew she had to decide and that she did. The softer, angelic nature in her overcame the barbaric, jealous one, and she set her lover free. The end still remains a mystery. Did the door open to a beautiful maiden or a fierce tiger
ready to tear the young man to pieces?Theme The story develops around more than one theme.Cruel and Kind: Juxtaposition of the kings (can be taken as the societys) cruel and kind. The lady behind one door depicts kindness, tame, mellow beautiful; whereas, the tiger represents cruelty in its worst formanger, merciless, savage.Selflessness vs.
Selfishness: The princesss prompt raising of the hand towards the right door for her lover to be set free shows the selfless nature in her. The inner pangs of jealousy, agony of losing her lover to the woman she hates, brings out the possessive, selfish side of her nature.Life and Death: The two identical doorsone leading to life and the other to deaththe
choice of which ultimately rests on the accused.Structure The story is divided in three parts. The first part discusses the kings nature and his justice system.The second part narrates the affair of the princess and the commoner, the kings discovery, and the lovers trial in the arena.The third part throws the light on the princesss decision. The story
ends with the narrator challenging the readers to finish the story.Setting The story takes place in unspecified land at an unspecified time.Characters The three main characters of the story are the king, the princess, and the commoner. The king is described as outwardly sophisticated and polished with a hidden murderous, savage nature. The
commoner is described as a handsome young man who loves the princess deeply. Both characters are stereotypes, and do not undergo much change in the story. The princesss character has more shades than any other character in the story. The emotional upheavals of losing her lover to another woman or the tiger, brings out both sides to her
nature. From the possessive, detesting side to a merciful, loving one, the princesss emotions are tossed from side to side like a storm causing the boat to rock from side to side.Conflicts The entire story is based on conflictsthe conflicting nature in the king, the conflict of emotions in the princess who has to take a decision, and the doors depicting
conflicts of life and death.Irony Irony is present throughout the story. For example: the lovers complete trust in the princess to show him the correct door. The trial day unfolds the truth of the princesss revelation on which of the doors would either set her lover free or kill him. Worst still, is her decision to let him marry the maiden and not let the
tiger tear him to pieces.Lesson Most stories depict the characters being influenced by outer forces, uncontrollable situation or destiny. However, this story focuses on the power of choice. The king allows the accused to choose his verdict (in a way). The entire story is based on choices, not knowing which side the scales will tilt. The narrator ends the
story in suspense, letting the readers decide the outcome. The message is clear that life is based on the choices we make.Stockton said: If you decide which it wasthe lady or the tigeryou find out what kind of person you are yourself. Well, he definitely did not have an answer. Though, he had planned an appropriate ending to the story, he could not
write one, as he states further for I had not the advantage of being either semi-barbaric or a woman. meaning he left the choice to the reader to let the shrewd, wicked side of one take precedence over the harmless dove-like side or vice-versa. The Lady, or the Tiger? is a short story by Philadelphia-born author Frank R. Stockton published in the
American magazine The Century in 1882. (The edition used in this study guide is available on the Project Gutenberg website.)Stockton was best known among his contemporaries for his humorous and unconventional fairy tales, which have been widely adapted since they were published in the late 19th and early 20th century. Some have been turned
into plays and radio dramas or referenced in popular songs and TV shows. Maurice Sendak, for example, illustrated two of Stocktons tales, The Griffin and the Minor Canon and The Bee-man or Orn, which earned him a Lewis Carroll Shelf Award in 1963. Stocktons work spanned other popular genres, including science fiction and adventure, and his
1895 novel The Adventures of Captain Horn was among the best-selling books in the United States at the time. The Lady, or the Tiger?, arguably Stocktons most famous fable, has cemented its place as a classic in American literature.The story opens in the very olden time in an unspecified kingdoma characteristic setting for fairy tales of European
traditionand introduces a semi-barbaric king with large, florid, and untrammeled ideas (Paragraph 1). He is described as exuberant and authoritarian, with the ability to turn his most fanciful notions into realities, as nothing [pleased] him so much as to make the crooked straight and crush down uneven places (Paragraph 1).The king has established a
peculiar way to determine an accused criminals guilt. The defendant is brought to a public arena where they are made to choose between two identical doors. Behind one of the doors stands a hungry tiger ready to eat them, and behind the other is a fair lady they are made to marry. The accused do not know which door leads to which outcome, but
they are required to choose. The narrator praises the perfect fairness of the system and its positively determinate results (Paragraph 7). The king claims that the subjects freedom to decide ensures the total impartiality of the system and that his guilt or innocence is proven as soon as he opens a door.The king has a daughter who is the apple of his
eye, and [...] loved by him above all humanity, and whose soul is as fervent and imperious as his own (Paragraph 9). When he discovers that the princess has had an affair with a young courtier, the king immediately [casts him] into prison and starts preparing for his public trial (Paragraph 9). He has the kingdoms tiger cages searched for the most
savage and relentless beasts (Paragraph 10), while judges seek out the fairest and most beautiful maiden to be the young mans brideshould he be deemed innocent.When the day of the trial arrives, the young man enters the arena under the crowds hums of admiration and anxiety (Paragraph 12). He then bows to the princess who, unbeknownst to all,
has worked tirelessly to learn the secret of the two doors since her lover was arrested. Possessed of more power, influence, and force of character than any one who had ever before been interested in such a case (Paragraph 13), the princess discovered which door hides the tiger and which the lady.The princess has also learned who the lady is, and
she is jealous of her: Often had she seen, or imagined that she had seen, this fair creature throwing glances of admiration upon the person of her lover, and sometimes she thought these glances were perceived, and even returned (Paragraph 14). Although she cannot be certain of her lovers infidelity, the princesss doubts and her impetuous nature are
made evident. She does not want her lover to die, but she equally does not want him to marry another woman.When the lover turns to the princess, asking for her help in choosing which door to open, she discreetly points toward the door to the right. The narrative part of the short story ends here, with the line: Now, the point of the story is this: Did
the tiger come out of that door, or did the lady? (Paragraph 19). This question, posed directly to the reader, introduces a shift in the narration in the last few paragraphs of the story. Up to now, it is written in the omniscient third person. It switches to a first-person narrator who directly addresses the reader, reminding them of the crux of the problem
and the stakes, and finally asking them to decide which came out of the open door (Paragraph 26). Talk about a no-win situation: Frank Stockton's The Lady, or the Tiger? (1882) is a fairy tale and fascinating allegory. We hope our study guide is particularly useful for teachers and students to fully appreciate the story's quandary and its themes. It's a
great persuasive writing prompt.Read the story: The Lady, or the Tiger?, Character Analysis & Summary, Genre & Themes, Literary Devices, Quotes, Discussion Questions, Paired Readings, Useful Links, and Notes/Teacher Comments The King - The semi-barbaric ruler, who enjoys administering justice by chance, in which the person on trial must
blindly choose their fate, whether to die or live with a determined outcome.The Princess - The King's daughter falls in love with a young man, who, once her father learns of their affair, subjects him to a perilous fate in which he must choose one of two doors. Behind one holds a tiger, who will eat him; the other hides a young maiden whom he must
marry. The Princess, who is semi-barbaric as is her father, knows which door hides each creature, and signals the young man to pick the door on the right. Will she show her barbaric side (being impetuous and jeolous), or her humane side (allow her lover to live, but be with another). The reader is left to guess her decision.The Young Man - The
handsome and brave courtier loves the Princess, but when his intentions are discovered by the King, he is subject to the worst punishment of all, a public demonstration of his fate in which he faces either certain death, or is forced to marry a maiden, rather than his beloved Princess.The Lady - The lovely young maiden who waits behind one of the
doors and would be the Young Man's bride if he chooses her door, is hated by the Princess.Plot Summary: The story is set in a kingdom ruled by a semi-barbaric king, who rules calmly and wisely for certain things, but relishes public trials of chance to administer justice for things he cares about, primarly for his own pleasure.The Lady GenreThe Lady,
or the Tiger? is in the genre of fairy tale, rather than a short story, with the sub-genre of allegory. It has two levels of meaning: the first is the story itself, the second is its symbolic meaning and lessons it offers the reader.ThemesDeterminism versus Free Will (alternatively, Fate versus Choice) Since the King presents an out-of-their control, no-win
"choice" for the Young Man (determinism), he and the Princess cannot pursue their love for eachother (free will). Ironically, the Princess can exercise free will deciding the fate of her lover, since she knows the secret of what's behind each door and can choose his fate.Barbarism versus Progressiveness - Stockton emphatically described the King as
"semi-barbaric" in his self-serving desires and "exuberant fancy" for public spectacles of cruelty (barbarism). Yet he has a "civilized" side in his commitment to administer justice in an impartial and incorruptible manner by chance, and "develop the mental energies of the people."Trust versus Betrayal - Though the Princess seems to be deeply in love
with the young man, and he trusts her with his life, she is faced with two opposing emotions: jealousy and hatred for the young maiden if her lover survives, or mortal anguish should he be devoured by a Tiger. We learn she has deliberated long and hard over both outcomes. The reader is given more clues that she's leaning towards the Tiger-door
option (her barbaric half).Love it, set it freeCovet versus True Love - If the reader is pulling for her civilized half, she might opt for the sentimental (butterfly) option: "If you love something, set it free." Wait, would this mean he's "free" to love the maiden? Clearly, it's an unsolvable problem for the Princess, consuming all her energy. Either result is a
tragic loss for her. Ironically, the courtier has absolute trust in her decision, whichever it may be. The Tiger Literary DevicesSuppressed ending: Stockton uses the literary device of supressing the ending to create suspense for the reader, which creates more questions than answers. Just as the Princess deliberates on the "right" choice to guide her
lover to his fate, the reader is left guessing, and wrestling with terrible outcomes (particularly for the Princess). The problem described in his tale has become a literary expression meaning an unsolvable or impossible problem to solve. "Which will it be, the lady or the tiger?"Symbols: Stockton writes an allegory, two levels of meaning, in which the
deeper level is represented by symbols. The doors represent fate, the tiger represents death and punishment, the lady symbolizes innocence and reward (it's not her fault she's lovely and the Princess is jealous). "Doleful iron bells" represent mourning, while "gay brass bells" represent celebration and life. Stockton's symbols help readers broaden their
appreciation for the deeper level of the story's meaning, and perhaps relate it to their own life lessons.Interesting VocabularySemi-barbaric: Half savage or uncivilized, brutal and cruel, the other half civilized or "not quite" barbaric. It's a confusing juxtaposition, which makes it a perfect adjective to describe the King and the Princess.Barleycorn:
While literally a grain of barley or unit of measurement based on the length of the grain, Stockton's description: "...every barleycorn a king, knew no tradition to which he owed more allegiance than pleased his fancy" may also be a reference to an ancient British folksong personifying the ill-fated: John Bar-Ley-CornChoristers: A member of a choir, or
someone leading singing, used in the story to describe a "good" outcome: "Another door opened beneath the king, and a priest, followed by a band of choristers' and dancing maidens blowing joyous airs on golden horns and treading an measure."Moiety: Each of two parts (another reference to semi-barbaric): "Had it not been for the moiety of
barbarism in her nature, it is probable that lady would not have been there."Frank Stockton Explain what the following quotes mean and how they relate to the story:"He was a man of exuberant fancy, and, withal, of an authority so irresistible that, at his will, he turned his varied fancies into facts. He was greatly given to self-communing; and, when
he and himself agreed upon any thing, the thing was done.""The arena of the king was built, not to give the people an opportunity of hearing the rhapsodies of dying gladiators, nor to enable them to view the inevitable conclusion of a conflict between religious opinions and hungry jaws, but for purposes far better adapted to widen and develop the
mental energies of the people. This vast amphitheatre, with its encircling galleries, its mysterious vaults, and its unseen passages, was an agent of poetic justice, in which crime was punished. Or virtue rewarded, by the decrees of an impartial and incorruptible chance.""The moment that the case of the criminal was thus decided, doleful iron bells
were clanged, great wails went up from the hired mourners posted on the outer rim of the arena, and the vast audience, with bowed heads and downcast hearts, wended slowly their homeward way, mourning greatly that one so young and fair, or so old and respected, should have merited so dire a fate.""The decisions of this tribunal were not only
fair, they were positively determinate: the accused person was instantly punished if he found himself guilty; and, if innocent, he was rewarded on the spot, whether he liked it or not. There was no escape from the judgments or the king's arena.""Among his courtiers was a young man of that fineness of blood and lowness of station common to the
conventional heroes of romance who love royal maidens. This royal maiden was well satisfied with her lover, for he was handsome and brave to a degree unsurpassed in all this kingdom; and she loved him with an ardor that had enough of barbarism in it to make it exceedingly warm and strong.""He had loved the Princess, and neither he, she, nor any
one else thought of denying the fact; but the king would not think of allowing any fact of this kind to interfere with the workings of the tribunal, in which he took such great delight and satisfaction.""Possessed of more power, influence, and force of character than any one who had ever before been interested in such a case, she had done what no other
person had done,--she had possessed herself of the secret of the doors.""It was one of tile fairest and loveliest of the damsels of the court who had been selected as the reward of the accused youth, should he be proved innocent of the crime of aspiring to one so far above him; and the Princess hated her.""She raised her hand, and made a slight, quick
movement toward the right. No one but her lover saw her.""Think of it, fair reader, not as if the decision of the question depended upon yourself, but upon that hot-blooded, semi-barbaric Princess, her soul at a white heat beneath the combined fires of despair and jealousy. She had lost him, but who should have him?"First edition cover, 1884 1.
Explain the meaning of "semi-barbaric" and why it's a perfect adjective to describe both the King and the Princess. How can someone be half cruel, brutal and uncivilized, and half not?2. Stockton begs the question: "Which came out of the opened door,--the lady, or the tiger?" Write a persuasive argument for which choice the Princess ended up
making, and why.3. Explain why this situation poses an unsolvable problem.4. Determinism versus Free Will is one of the story's themes. Explain both concepts as revealed in this tale."5. Think of this tale from the young man's point of view, if he could choose. If he was a Romantic, might he die rather than lose his true love? Or, is he a Realist, settling
for survival with a fair maiden? Sure beats being dead.6. Using the literary device of allegory, the story has two layers of meaning. Explain each layer and what the symbols represent.7. Relate the concept of "fate" to a situation in your own life where a "choice" wasn't really up to you. Have you ever had to make a "lady or the tiger?" decision?8. Read
the sequel to this story, The Discourager of Hesitancy, and compare the King's "choice" offered to a visiting prince requesting a wife, with the young man's in this story.9. Think of a story, book, or movie in which the ending was withheld, leaving the reader or audience to determine the ending, or guessing what happens next. (Can't think of one? Try
the Harry Potter series). Discuss why this is an appealing technique to keep us coming back for more? The Discourager of Hesitancy Compare The Lady, or the Tiger? themes and literary devices to these stories:The Discourager of Hesitancy, the story's sequel, in which the reader eagerly hopes to discover which fate the Princess chose for her lover in
the first story.The Monkey's Paw by W.W. Jacobs, which shares the literary device of a dramatically suppressed ending, leaving the reader to figure it out.Marjorie Daw by Thomas Bailey Aldrich, offers a dramatic surprise ending.The Most Dangerous Game by Richard Connell, another story with an impossible "choice"-- both of deadly
consequence.The Travelling Companion by Hans Christian Andersen, compare the Princesses' character, motives, and "evilness."The Cunning Little Tailor by The Brothers Grimm, compare the riddling Princess, and whether both stories share aspects of the fairy tale genre.Choose one of these Morality Tales and compare its lesson to this story.
Barbarian or Civilized?A Teacher's Work Is Never Done We need to hear from you! Please share your lesson plans, discussion questions, or pitfalls to avoid while teaching this work, in pursuing our common interests of helping more students enjoy reading classic literature! Contact us via Facebook or Twitter Visit our Teacher Resources for
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What is the moral of the lady or the tiger. What is the theme of the lady or the tiger.