

Désirée's Baby - Kate Chopin

"[Désirée's Baby](#)" is a short story which has been penned by [Kate Chopin](#), an American author in the late 1800s. The story was first appeared in 1892.

Désirée's Baby follows a very simple story line where a white woman who has a baby with African roots and her husband rejecting her and the baby because of that.

This story is included into the high school curriculum of the USA and is read by hundreds of thousands of children across the world. You can download a free PDF copy of Désirée's Baby story right below and also download a worksheet with many questions and answers.

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Désirée's Baby

As the day was pleasant, Madame Valmondé drove over to L'Abri to see Désirée and the baby.

It made her laugh to think of Désirée with a baby. Why, it seemed but yesterday that Désirée was little more than a baby herself; when Monsieur in riding through the gateway of Valmondé had found her lying asleep in the shadow of the big stone pillar.

The little one awoke in his arms and began to cry for "Dada." That was as much as she could do or say. Some people thought she might have strayed there of her own accord, for she was of the toddling age.

The prevailing belief was that she had been purposely left by a party of Texans, whose canvas-covered wagon, late in the day, had crossed the ferry that Coton Mais kept, just below the plantation.

In time Madame Valmondé abandoned every speculation but the one that Désirée had been sent to her by a beneficent Providence to be the child of her affection, seeing that she was without child of the flesh. For the girl grew to be beautiful and gentle, affectionate and sincere,—the idol of Valmondé.

It was no wonder, when she stood one day against the stone pillar in whose shadow she had lain asleep, eighteen years before, that Armand Aubigny riding by and seeing her there, had fallen in love with her. That was the way all the Aubignys fell in love, as if struck by a pistol shot.

Désirée and Aubignys

The wonder was that he had not loved her before; for he had known her since his father brought him home from Paris, a boy of eight, after his mother died there. The passion that awoke in him that day, when he saw her at the gate, swept along like an avalanche, or like a prairie fire, or like anything that drives headlong over all obstacles.

Monsieur Valmondé grew practical and wanted things well considered: that is, the girl's obscure origin. Armand looked into her eyes and did not care. He was reminded that she was nameless. What did it matter about a name when he could give her one of the oldest and proudest in Louisiana?

He ordered the corbeille from Paris, and contained himself with what patience he could until it arrived; then they were married.

Madame Valmondé had not seen Désirée and the baby for four weeks. When she reached L'Abri she shuddered at the first sight of it, as she always did. It was a sad looking place, which for many years had not known the gentle presence of a mistress, old Monsieur Aubigny having married and buried his wife in France, and she having loved her own land too well ever to leave it.

The roof came down steep and black like a cowl, reaching out beyond the wide galleries that encircled the yellow stuccoed house. Big, solemn oaks grew close to it, and their thick-leaved, far-reaching branches shadowed it like a pall.

Young Aubigny's rule was a strict one, too, and under it his negroes had forgotten how to be gay, as they had been during the old master's easy-going and indulgent lifetime.

What does Armand say

The young mother was recovering slowly, and lay full length, in her soft white muslins and laces, upon a couch. The baby was beside her, upon her arm, where he had fallen asleep, at her breast. The yellow nurse woman sat beside a window fanning herself.

Madame Valmondé bent her portly figure over Désirée and kissed her, holding her an instant tenderly in her arms. Then she turned to the child.

“This is not the baby!” she exclaimed, in startled tones. French was the language spoken at Valmondé in those days.

“I knew you would be astonished,” laughed Désirée, “at the way he has grown. The little cochon de lait! Look at his legs, mamma, and his hands and fingernails,—real finger-nails. Zandrine had to cut them this morning. Isn't it true, Zandrine?”

The woman bowed her turbaned head majestically, “Mais si, Madame.”

“And the way he cries,” went on Désirée, “is deafening. Armand heard him the other day as far away as La Blanche's cabin.”

Madame Valmondé had never removed her eyes from the child. She lifted it and walked with it over to the window that was lightest. She scanned the baby narrowly, then looked as searchingly at Zandrine, whose face was turned to gaze across the fields.

“Yes, the child has grown, has changed,” said Madame Valmondé, slowly, as she replaced it beside its mother. “What does Armand say?”

Désirée's face became suffused with a glow that was happiness itself.

“Oh, Armand is the proudest father in the parish, I believe, chiefly because it is a boy, to bear his name; though he says not,—that he would have loved a girl as well. But I know it isn't true. I know he says that to please me. And Mamma,” she added, drawing Madame Valmondé's head down to her, and speaking in a whisper, “he hasn't punished one of them—not one of them—since baby is born. Even Négrillon, who pretended to have burnt his leg that he might rest from work—he only laughed, and said Négrillon was a great scamp. Oh, Mamma, I'm so happy; it frightens me.”

A change in manner

What Désirée said was true. Marriage, and later the birth of his son had softened Armand Aubigny's imperious and exacting nature greatly. This was what made the gentle Désirée so happy, for she loved him desperately.

When he frowned, she trembled, but loved him. When he smiled, she asked no greater blessing of God. But Armand's dark, handsome face had not often been disfigured by frowns since the day he fell in love with her.

When the baby was about three months old, Désirée awoke one day to the conviction that there was something in the air menacing her peace. It was at first too subtle to grasp. It had only been a

disquieting suggestion; an air of mystery among the blacks; unexpected visits from far-off neighbors who could hardly account for their coming.

Then a strange, an awful change in her husband's manner, which she dared not ask him to explain. When he spoke to her, it was with averted eyes, from which the old love-light seemed to have gone out.

He absented himself from home; and when there, avoided her presence and that of her child, without excuse. And the very spirit of Satan seemed suddenly to take hold of him in his dealings with the slaves. Désirée was miserable enough to die.

She sat in her room, one hot afternoon, in her peignoir, listlessly drawing through her fingers the strands of her long, silky brown hair that hung about her shoulders. The baby, half naked, lay asleep upon her own great mahogany bed, that was like a sumptuous throne, with its satin-lined half-canopy.

Armand, the father

One of La Blanche's little quadroon boys—half naked too—stood fanning the child slowly with a fan of peacock feathers. Désirée's eyes had been fixed absently and sadly upon the baby, while she was striving to penetrate the threatening mist that she felt closing about her.

She looked from her child to the boy who stood beside him, and back again; over and over. "Ah!" It was a cry that she could not help; which she was not conscious of having uttered. The blood turned like ice in her veins, and a clammy moisture gathered upon her face.

She tried to speak to the little quadroon boy; but no sound would come, at first. When he heard his name uttered, he looked up, and his mistress was pointing to the door. He laid aside the great, soft fan, and obediently stole away, over the polished floor, on his bare tiptoes.

She stayed motionless, with gaze riveted upon her child, and her face the picture of fright.

Presently her husband entered the room, and without noticing her, went to a table and began to search among some papers which covered it.

"Armand," she called to him, in a voice which must have stabbed him, if he was human. But he did not notice. "Armand," she said again. Then she rose and tottered towards him. "Armand," she panted once more, clutching his arm, "look at our child. What does it mean? Tell me."

He coldly but gently loosened her fingers from about his arm and thrust the hand away from him. "Tell me what it means!" she cried despairingly.

"It means," he answered lightly, "that the child is not white; it means that you are not white."

To go or not to go

A quick conception of all that this accusation meant for her nerved her with unwonted courage to deny it. "It is a lie; it is not true, I am white! Look at my hair, it is brown; and my eyes are gray, Armand, you know they are gray. And my skin is fair," seizing his wrist. "Look at my hand; whiter than yours, Armand," she laughed hysterically.

"As white as La Blanche's," he returned cruelly; and went away leaving her alone with their child.

When she could hold a pen in her hand, she sent a despairing letter to Madame Valmondé.

"My mother, they tell me I am not white. Armand has told me I am not white. For God's sake tell them it is not true. You must know it is not true. I shall die. I must die. I cannot be so unhappy, and live."

The answer that came was brief:

"My own Désirée: Come home to Valmondé; back to your mother who loves you. Come with your child."

When the letter reached Désirée, she went with it to her husband's study, and laid it open upon the desk before which he sat. She was like a stone image: silent, white, motionless after she placed it there.

In silence he ran his cold eyes over the written words.

He said nothing. "Shall I go, Armand?" she asked in tones sharp with agonized suspense.

"Yes, go."

"Do you want me to go?"

"Yes, I want you to go."

The cursed brand of Slavery

He thought Almighty God had dealt cruelly and unjustly with him; and felt, somehow, that he was paying Him back in kind when he stabbed thus into his wife's soul. Moreover he no longer loved her, because of the unconscious injury she had brought upon his home and his name.

She turned away like one stunned by a blow, and walked slowly towards the door, hoping he would call her back.

"Good-bye, Armand," she moaned.

He did not answer her. That was his last blow at fate.

Désirée went in search of her child. Zandrine was pacing the somber gallery with it. She took the little one from the nurse's arms with no word of explanation, and descending the steps, walked away, under the live-oak branches.

It was an October afternoon; the sun was just sinking. Out in the still fields the negroes were picking cotton.

Désirée had not changed the thin white garment nor the slippers which she wore. Her hair was uncovered and the sun's rays brought a golden gleam from its brown meshes. She did not take the broad, beaten road which led to the far-off plantation of Valmondé. She walked across a deserted field, where the stubble bruised her tender feet, so delicately shod, and tore her thin gown to shreds.

She disappeared among the reeds and willows that grew thick along the banks of the deep, sluggish bayou; and she did not come back again.

Some weeks later there was a curious scene enacted at L'Abri. In the center of the smoothly swept back yard was a great bonfire. Armand Aubigny sat in the wide hallway that commanded a view of the spectacle; and it was he who dealt out to a half dozen negroes the material which kept this fire ablaze.

A graceful cradle of willow, with all its dainty furbishings, was laid upon the pyre, which had already been fed with the richness of a priceless layette. Then there were silk gowns, and velvet and satin ones added to these; laces, too, and embroideries; bonnets and gloves; for the corbeille had been of rare quality.

The last thing to go was a tiny bundle of letters; innocent little scribblings that Désirée had sent to him during the days of their espousal. There was the remnant of one back in the drawer from which he took them. But it was not Désirée's; it was part of an old letter from his mother to his father. He read it. She was thanking God for the blessing of her husband's love:—

“But above all,” she wrote, “night and day, I thank the good God for having so arranged our lives that our dear Armand will never know that his mother, who adores him, belongs to the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery.”

Theme and moral of “Désirée’s Baby”

The moral of the story “Désirée’s Baby” is that things are not always what they seem to be. Alternatively the moral of the story is that racism is wrong, and that racial purity is not a measure of who a person is.

The theme of the short story is the gender disparity in a patriarchal society and the economic inequalities between different classes, both of which were widely prevalent and socially accepted in the 19th century. It also showcases the slave culture and the racism that was well established and accepted within the society.

Summary of Désirée’s Baby

Désirée is the daughter of Monsieur Valmondé and Madame Valmondé. They are very wealthy French Creoles in antebellum Louisiana. When she was a baby, Désirée was found lying in the shadow of a stone pillar, abandoned by her parents. Monsieur Valmondé finds her and since she is childless, she adopts Désirée gratefully.

She is extremely beautiful and everyone in the town loves her. Armand Aubigny, the son of a wealthy French Creole family also falls in love with her and courts her. They get married and have a child. He then distances himself from her and their baby completely.

Désirée truly loves her husband and begs him to talk to her but to no avail. Her parents ask her to leave her husband and to come back home. It is now revealed that the baby is different to Désirée. The baby has the same color as that of a quadroon or a one-quarter African. This would mean that the baby has African ancestry.

Désirée's parents are not known as she was abandoned as a child. Armand immediately assumes that she is part black which enrages and disgusts him. Armand tells Désirée that he wants her and the baby to leave forever. She takes their child and walks off, never to be seen again.

In the end, the enraged Armand burns all of Désirée's personal belongings. In what was to be burnt were the letters that his wife had sent him during their courtship. In the same drawer where the letters were present, Armand finds another old letter which he had never seen before. The letter was sent by Armand's mother to his father.

The letter reveals a cruel twist that Armand is part black and that this secret had been kept from him. Thus it is revealed that the child is part black because of him and not her.

Analysis of Désirée's Baby

- In the short story "Désirée's Baby", the author explores the theme of the short story is the gender disparity in a patriarchal society and the economic inequalities between different classes, both of which were widely prevalent and socially accepted in the 19th century.
- The story also showcases the slave culture and the racism that was well established and accepted within the society.
- If we were to analyze the racism in the white French Creoles, we need to look at the setting of the story. Désirée's Baby is set to have occurred in the 1800s, which was before the civil war. It was common and prevalent in that era for white French Creoles to be wealthy slave-owning families who were very racist and separated themselves from their slaves.

Analysis of love

- From an analysis perspective another theme that can be seen is the contrast of love. A stark contrast is seen between the love exhibited by Désirée's parents, Armand and Armand's father.

- Armand falls in love suddenly with Désirée just as his father had done with his mother “like a pistol shot”.
- It is implied that Armand’s father had loved his mother dearly. The difference between him and his father is that Armand fell out of love just as quickly because his love was based only on ownership.
- Armand stops loving Désirée because she might have African roots. He only cares about himself and nobody else. He does not love Désirée but owns her as he would own or purchase a slave.
- His father married his mother and did not care about her background. He never viewed his wife to be unworthy. Armand on the other hand views Désirée as unworthy similar to the slave La Blanche.
- The Valmondés adopted Désirée with happiness and loved her without any condition.
- Armand's parents show that they love him and want to protect him. They keep Armand's roots a secret so that he would not be blemished with having African roots in a world where they would become a slave. Armand is cruel and does not protect his son or his wife from this fate.

Analysis of La Blanche

- La Blanche is a character who does not appear in the story but is mentioned. Nevertheless it is a very important character since it advances the plot of the story and influences Désirée’s decision to suicide along with her child.
- So who is La Blanche. La Blanche is hinted at being a black slave who Armand had a sexual relationship with. La Blanche’s cabin is mentioned in the story to show that Armand did have sexual congress with her because she is his slave and his “property.”
- Note how, in a sense, Désirée is also his “property” as a wife whom he “bought” with gifts and wealth, though of course slavery is even more pernicious and awful than the “traditional” gender norms of the time.
- The slave boy who’s task is to fan the baby also looks white although he has black roots. But nevertheless because he has black roots, he is forced to be a slave.
- Désirée’s realizes that her child looks exactly like the slave boy and hence will suffer the same fate and will never have the comfort and wealth which she has.
- In the end of the story, it is shown that Désirée’s shame and fear at her son being black is great. It is great so much that she commits suicide taking her child’s life as well instead of returning to her loving mother.

Analysis of Armand’s Parents

- In the end, Armand is shown as having African roots because of his mother. He is part of the race that he considers as slaves and inferior.
- He rejects his son and his wife while in reality it was himself that he should have rejected.
- It was his parent's choice to not reveal Armand's past to hi. They did so in order to protect him as we have seen in the case of La Blanche. This in turn led him to become a racist and kill his wife and his child.
- Ironically, by protecting Armand, his parent's end up ruining his life.

Questions and Answers - Désirée's Baby – Set 1

1. Who are the main characters in Désirée's Baby?

- The main characters in the story are Madame Valmondé, Désirée and her husband Armand Aubigny.

2. Who is the protagonist of the story Désirée's Baby?

- The protagonist of the story is the lovely young Désirée.

3. What happened in the start of story Désirée's Baby?

- In the start of the story, Madame Valmondé was driving over to L'Abri to see Désirée and the newborn baby.

4. What is the theme of Désirée's Baby?

- The theme of the short story is the gender disparity in a patriarchal society and the economic inequalities between different classes, both of which were widely prevalent and socially accepted in the 19th century. It also showcases the slave culture and the racism that was well established and accepted within the society.

5. What is the moral of Désirée's Baby?

- The moral of the story "Désirée's Baby" is that things are not always what they seem to be. Alternatively the moral of the story is that racism is wrong, and that racial purity is not a measure of who a person is.

Questions and Answers - Désirée's Baby – Set 2

6. What happens at the end of Désirée's Baby?

- Désirée's leaves with her baby and is never seen again. Armand finds a letter from his mother to his father revealing that Armand is part black and that this secret had been kept from him. Thus it is revealed that the child is part black because of him and not her.

7. What is *Désirée's Baby* story about?

- *Désirée's Baby* is a famous short story authored by Kate Chopin and was published in 1898. It is about a white woman who has a baby with African roots and her husband rejecting her and the baby because of that.

8. What is the irony in *Désirée's Baby*?

- The storyline followed in *Désirée's Baby* is that Armand is extremely racist and hence ends up rejecting his wife and his baby. He thinks that his baby has African roots because of her. In the end, he finds a letter that reveals a cruel twist that Armand is part black and that this secret had been kept from him by his mother. Thus it is revealed that the child is part black because of him and not her.

9. Who is *Désirée*?

- *Désirée* is the daughter of Monsieur Valmondé and Madame Valmondé. They are very wealthy French Creoles in antebellum Louisiana.

Questions and Answers - *Désirée's Baby* – Set 3

10. Where was *Désirée* found?

- When she was a baby, *Désirée* was found lying in the shadow of a stone pillar, abandoned by her parents. Monsieur Valmondé finds her and since she is childless, she adopts *Désirée* gratefully.

11. Who is Armand Aubigny?

- Armand Aubigny is the son of a wealthy French Creole family also falls in love with *Désirée* and courts her. They get married and have a child.
- He then distances himself from her and their baby completely.

12. Why did Armand Aubigny hate *Désirée* and his baby?

- The baby is revealed to have the skin color as that of a quadroon or a one-quarter African. This would mean that the baby has African ancestry. Armand Aubigny is very racist and hence rejects both of them.

13. What happens in the conclusion of the story?

- In the end, the enraged Armand burns all of *Désirée's* personal belongings. In what was to be burnt were the letters that his wife had sent him during their courtship. In the same drawer where the letters were present, Armand finds another old letter which he had never seen before. The letter was sent by Armand's mother to his father.

14. What is the cruel twist in the story?

- In the end, the cruel twist that Armand is part black and that the child is part black because of him and not his wife.

Questions and Answers - Désirée's Baby – Set 4

15. What happens to Desiree and the baby?

- Desiree takes the child and wanders into the swamp, never to be seen again. It is implied that both mother and child likely drowned in the swamp.

16. What does La Blanche mean in Désirée's baby?

- La Blanche also known as the White was one of Désirée and Armand's slaves who is of mixed origin but looks white.

17. Is Desiree Black in Desiree's baby?

- Desiree is white in appearance. Because of Désirée's unknown parents, Armand immediately assumes that she is part black since his child has African roots.

18. Does Armand truly love Desiree?

- Armand loves Desiree only for beauty and is conditional on her being white. He did not love her for her character or for who she is. His love can best be described as superficial.

19. Is Armand mother black in Desiree's baby?

- Armand's mother, Madame Aubigny, was revealed in the end of the story to be black.

Questions and Answers - Désirée's Baby – Set 5

20. Who is the major antagonist in Desiree's baby?

- The antagonist in Désirée's Baby is her husband Armand. Her husband as he ends up rejecting her and the baby because he is racist. The society as well as his parents are to blame since his parents chose not to reveal that his mother was black which would have changed his perception about the race.

21. Is Desiree's baby Based on a true story?

- The short story is not based on a true incident but it is a work of realistic fiction. It details many of the accepted social attitudes and racist behaviour which was prevalent in Louisiana in the 1800s.

22. Why is Madame Valmonde shocked when she sees the baby?

- Madame Valmonde is shocked because she realizes that the child is of mixed ethnic origin and has African roots.

23. How did Armand treat Desiree?

- At the start of the story, Armand treats Desiree with great love showering joy and happiness in their relationship. Later, when the child is born and is not completely white, Armand begins to treat her cruelly.

24. What made Desiree believe that Armand was very happy about the baby?

- Desiree believes that Armand was very happy about the baby because after the birth of his son, Armand Aubigny had softened and he was no longer as imperious and exacting as he was once before.