<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TERMS</th>
<th>DESSIRE’S BABY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kate Chopin</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting in Time</th>
<th>Before the civil world period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting in Place</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fictional Present</td>
<td>One day in July (begin) When he read the letter (finish)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Span</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere</td>
<td>Relax, tense, shaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point of View</td>
<td>3rd person narrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>This is foreshadow to the ending. The baby is a catalyst character. The story happens through the baby.</td>
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</tbody>
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### Characters

**Madame Valmonde:**
- Action
- Speech
- Description

**Desiree:**
- Action
- Speech
- Description
- Name

**Armand Aubigny:**

The baby boy, Zadrine, The quandroom boy

**Armand Aubigny**

Armand is a neighbor of the Valmondes. He has inherited his father's plantation along with one of the finest and oldest names in Louisiana. He seems to see the things in his life — Désirée, their child, his slaves — as mere possessions, ones that either reflect well or poorly upon him. His self-interest is easily evidenced in his strict rule of his slaves and his eager acquisition of Desiree. At first, Desiree's influence seems to soften him, and he is kinder to his slaves. She also thinks he is enormously proud of having a boy child — again, a possession that will bear his name. However, upon discovering his child's mixed ancestry, and blaming it on Desiree, Armand cruelly casts aside his wife and son, for they now have no worth to him. The unexplored irony of the story rests in his realization that it is he, not Desiree, who has African blood.

**Désirée Valmonde Aubigny**

Désirée is the adopted daughter of the Valmonde family. Madame and Monsieur Valmonde have raised Désirée since she was a toddler when they found her by the plantation's front gate. Despite the fact that her ancestry is unknown, Désirée has grown up to be the "idol of Valmonde." She is a sweet, kind, affectionate girl. Her mild-mannered character, however, leads her to rely too much on Armand's love and
approval. As his wife, her whole being seems centered around how her husband perceives her, their child, and their life together. When Armand rejects her, Désirée chooses to end her own life rather than start a new one at home with her loving parents. In so doing, she also chooses to end the life of her child, who has conspired unconsciously with her to bring shame to Armand’s name.

**Madame Valmonde**

Madame Valmonde sees Déesirée’s presence in her family as an act of God. She loves her daughter and continues to do so even after she comes to believe that Déesirée is of mixed racial ancestry. In pleading with her daughter to come home, Madame Valmonde demonstrates the depth of her maternal love.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene or Panorama</th>
<th>Most scenic presentation with panoramic details</th>
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<td>Symbols</td>
<td>Throughout her short story &quot;Desiree’s Baby,&quot; Kate Chopin uses symbolism to convey her themes of racial prejudice, unequal gender roles, and social hierarchy in a patriarchal society. The stone pillar is a phallic symbol of firm, forced male dominance in a patriarchal society. Chopin uses Desiree’s white clothing to symbolize the feminine element being introduced into society and the sun’s shining rays seem to represent the shifting of power roles among genders. Chopin uses the portrayal of the diverging roads as a symbol for the different paths taken. The beaten path represents the male opinionated way of life that society is prone to following; therefore, the deserted field signifies the progression of feminism.</td>
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| Themes            | **Race and Racism**
|                   | The themes of race and racism are integral to “Désirée’s Baby,” for prevailing ideas of Chopin’s time that African Americans were inferior to whites leads to the destruction of Désirée and her baby. Armand is confident in the superiority of his lineage and his race. He comes from “one of the oldest and proudest [families] in Louisiana.” Armand conducts himself in a way typical of the cruel master of southern legend. In marked contrast to his father, he rules his slaves strictly, and Désirée’s delight in his initial good mood after the birth of the baby demonstrates his true nature: “he hasn’t punished one of them [the slaves] — not one of them — since baby is born.” When the child begins to show evidence of being of mixed ancestry, Armand believes it must be Désirée’s unknown ancestors who have tainted his family and brought “unconscious injury . . . upon his home and his name.” He rejects both his wife and child because they are “not
white.” Yet, the irrationality of such racism is demonstrated at the end of the story when Armand discovers that it is he who is of mixed ancestry, not Désirée. Such a reversal clearly shows that ideas of race, and the racism stemming from such ideas, are created by humans alone.

**Love**

Love — and what this means to different people — is inherent in “Désirée’s Baby.” Armand hardly seems to truly love Désirée; rather, he “had fallen in love with her . . . as if struck by a pistol shot.” It seems more a passion that he feels for Désirée, not any deep-seated feeling or emotion. Indeed, Armand has known Désirée for years and never felt any feelings for her. Although the softening effect their marriage has on Armand is apparent — and this could derive from love — Armand seems to view Désirée more as a possession, something that reflects his status. After the birth of their child, Armand’s love for Désirée quickly dies, for she brings shame upon his name. That his love for her could so easily be transformed demonstrates its superficial quality. For her part, Désirée truly loves Armand. Her world seems to hinge on his thoughts and feelings. When he begins to avoid her, “Désirée was miserable enough to die.” Maternal love is evident in the story as well. Madame Valmonde demonstrates the great depth of maternal love she feels in her desire to have Désirée return home, even after she “learns” of Désirée’s child’s African-American ancestry. She also demonstrates her continuing love for her grandchild in the invitation. The maternal love Armand’s own mother felt for him can be seen in the letter he uncovers that his mother sent his father revealing how they hid from him the fact that his mother was of African descent. The logical explanation for this action is that his parents, who loved him, wanted to protect and shield him.

**Identity**

The theme of identity is important in “Désirée’s Baby.” The circumstances of her childhood strip Désirée of any true identity of her own. Her adoption by the Valmondes gives her a new identity, and indeed, she “grew to be beautiful and gentle, affectionate and sincere, — the idol of Valmonde.” However, Désirée’s true lack of identity never ceases to exist. When Armand wants to marry her, Monsieur Valmonde reminds the suitor that “she was nameless.” Armand’s insistence that her heritage doesn’t matter, that he will give her his name, enforces the idea that once again a new identity is being imposed upon Désirée, even if it does not fit her.
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