

Name: _____

Class: _____

Ripe Figs

By Kate Chopin
1893

Kate Chopin (1850-1904) was an American short story and novel writer who is now considered one of the forerunners of feminist literature. "Ripe Figs" was published in Vogue in 1893. As you read, consider the mood of this short story, and determine what the ripe figs symbolize.

- [1] Maman-Nainaine¹ said that when the figs were ripe Babette might go to visit her cousins down on the Bayou-Lafourche where the sugar cane grows. Not that the ripening of figs had the least thing to do with it, but that is the way Maman-Nainaine was.

It seemed to Babette a very long time to wait; for the leaves upon the trees were tender yet, and the figs were like little hard, green marbles.

But warm rains came along and plenty of strong sunshine, and though Maman-Nainaine was as patient as the statue of la Madone, and Babette as restless as a humming-bird, the first thing they both knew it was hot summer-time. Every day Babette danced out to where the fig-trees were in a long line against the fence. She walked slowly beneath them, carefully peering between the gnarled, spreading branches. But each time she came disconsolate² away again. What she saw there finally was something that made her sing and dance the whole long day.



"Ripe Fig on Fruit Tree in Southern France" by Stefan Thiesen is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

When Maman-Nainaine sat down in her stately way to breakfast, the following morning, her muslin cap standing like an aureole about her white, placid face, Babette approached. She bore a dainty porcelain platter, which she set down before her godmother. It contained a dozen purple figs, fringed around with their rich, green leaves.

- [5] "Ah," said Maman-Nainaine, arching her eyebrows, "how early the figs have ripened this year!"

"Oh," said Babette, "I think they have ripened very late."

1. Though not a direct translation, Maman-Nainaine is an equivalent term for "godmother." The character in this story is noted as Babette's godmother, so the name Maman-Nainaine is based more on her age than on her biological relationship with Babette.
2. **Disconsolate** (*adjective*) too sad to be comforted or cheered up

"Babette," continued Maman-Nainaine, as she peeled the very plumpest figs with her pointed silver fruit-knife, "you will carry my love to them all down on Bayou-Lafourche. And tell your Tante³ Frosine I shall look for her at Toussaint — when the chrysanthemums are in bloom."

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3. "Tante" means "aunt."