

THE GLENCOE LITERATURE LIBRARY

Study Guide

for

Ethan Frome

by **Edith Wharton**



New York, New York Columbus, Ohio Woodland Hills, California Peoria, Illinois

To the Teacher

The *Glencoe Literature Library* presents full-length novels and plays bound together with shorter selections of various genres that relate by theme or topic to the main reading. Each work in the *Library* has a two-part Study Guide that contains a variety of resources for both you and your students. Use the guide to plan your instruction of the work and enrich your classroom presentations.

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- *About the Work*: pertinent background information on the work, including a character list, a synopsis, key themes, and an annotated bibliography
- *Media Links*: annotated listings of audio, visual, electronic, and print resources related to the work
- *Teaching Options*: high-interest activities for introducing the work and individualizing instruction
- *Assessment Options*: alternative assessment activities for greater flexibility in evaluating students' understanding of the work
- *Options for Using Related Readings*: suggested approaches to the Related Readings included with the work
- *Answer Key* and *Assessment Rubrics*: detailed answers to all questions and reading activities and evaluations for alternative assessment activities

For the Student consists of these reproducible blackline masters:

- *Meet the Author*: a lively overview of the author's life
- *Introducing the Work*: background information that provides a meaningful context in which to read the work
- *Before You Read* and *Responding* pages: pre- and postreading questions and activities
- *Active Reading*: graphic organizers for students to complete as they read
- *Test*: a comprehensive two-part test of the work

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About the Work

ETHAN FROME

BY EDITH WHARTON

Of the more than forty books that Edith Wharton published, which include novels, collections of stories, and volumes of non-fiction, the novella *Ethan Frome* is probably the best known. But unlike several of Wharton's novels, it was not immediately popular when it was published in 1911. The author herself clearly felt strongly about the book. A year before she died, she had written a preface for it; even before that, she had expressed her fondness for it.

Ethan Frome is noteworthy not only for its title character, but also for the unrelentingly grim picture it paints of rural New England poverty. The novella is not typical of Wharton's work—much of which is focused on the lives of rich and leisured families—and some critics have called it unfeeling. Other critics, however, hail the short, stark work as a masterpiece of realism, and many readers have found it haunting.

CHARACTER LIST

An **unnamed narrator**, a visitor to the town of Starkfield, Massachusetts, who has come to work for the winter on a big power-house

Ethan Frome, a local farmer with a noticeable limp; a striking figure who intrigues the narrator

Zenobia (Zeena) Frome, Ethan's sickly and ever-complaining wife

Mattie Silver, Zeena's young cousin who comes from Connecticut to take care of her

Ned Hale, Andrew's son who courts and marries Ruth Varnum

Mrs. Ned Hale, formerly Ruth Varnum, the widow with whom the narrator lodges

SYNOPSIS

Set in the town of Starkfield, Massachusetts, some time in the late nineteenth century, the novella opens with the unnamed

narrator's description of Ethan Frome and the curiosity the striking figure arouses in him. He discovers that Ethan's limp was caused years before by an accident, but the townspeople are reluctant to discuss the circumstances. One day Ethan gives the narrator a ride. A snowstorm interrupts the journey, and Ethan puts him up at his own house. After that visit, the narrator pieces together his own "vision" of Ethan's story.

According to the narrator, Ethan married the older Zeena both because she had nursed his dying mother and for companionship. Zeena's vague illnesses and quarrelsome nature thwart Ethan's aspiration to leave Starkfield. In time, he becomes trapped in a cold, loveless marriage. When a penniless cousin of Zeena's, Mattie Silver, arrives to help with the housework, Ethan's spirits are lifted. Mattie is young, warm, and happy, and Ethan falls in love with her.

One day, Zeena decides to consult an out-of-town doctor for her ailments. Ethan and Mattie are left home alone, and Mattie prepares supper. To make the table pretty, she sets the table with Zeena's prized, unused pickle-dish. The cat breaks the dish, and before Ethan can put it back together, Zeena discovers it. Out of anger and spite, Zeena announces to Ethan that she has hired another girl to replace Mattie and demands that Mattie leave.

Angry and defiant, Ethan insists that he take Mattie to the train station. On the way, the two declare their love for each other. They stop to sled down a popular hill in town, a thrill that Ethan had promised Mattie in happier times. After the first dangerous ride down the icy slope, Mattie convinces Ethan to ride again. They target an old elm tree in a double suicide attempt. They hit the tree, but they survive the smash-up. Mattie is crippled and Ethan is maimed. Roles are reversed and Mattie must depend on Zeena's care, as does a sad, broken Ethan Frome.

MAJOR THEMES IN THE NOVELLA

- *The price exacted by rural and psychic isolation:* In the introduction, the narrator says that “when winter shut down on Starkfield, and the village lay under a sheet of snow perpetually renewed from the pale skies, I began to see what life there—or rather its negation—must have been in Ethan Frome’s young manhood” (pages 2–3). Early in his life, Ethan desires to move to a more congenial setting and to banish his deep sense of loneliness. The tragedy of his failure to do so is emphasized by the descriptions of the harsh New England winter landscape.
- *The redemptive power and limitations of love:* When Ethan falls in love with Mattie, his life gains meaning, and the happiness of the young engaged couple Ned Hale and Ruth Varnum highlights the joy that love can bring. Ethan and Mattie’s love is not enough to sustain them, however.
- *The importance of self-respect and honor:* Ethan decides against running off with Mattie in part because it would require him take money on false pretenses from good people, and he has too much pride to do so. “He could have done so only by deceiving two kindly people who had pitied him” (page 59). Under the strain resulting from the accident, Mattie and Ethan’s love for each other cannot survive.

APPROACHES TO TEACHING THE NOVELLA

- *Teach students how to identify foils in fiction.*
 - Before they read, remind students that a foil is a minor character whose traits, when contrasted with a main character’s, highlight those of the main character. Tell them that a main character can have more than one foil. Encourage students to identify, as they read, foils

for Ethan and for Mattie as individual characters, and for Ethan and Mattie as a couple. Ask them to explain what traits are highlighted by the foils. After they have finished reading the novella, ask students whether, in their opinions, the story would have been more or less tragic without the foils and why.

- *Teach Ethan Frome as a frame story.*

Explain that a frame story is a story told within another story. The frame, or outer story, usually precedes and follows the inner, more important, story.

 - After they have read the Beginning and Chapter I, ask students to identify the outer story and the inner story of *Ethan Frome*. Suggest that as they continue reading, they notice which of the story’s ideas and images in the outer story also appear in the inner story.
 - When they have finished reading the novella, have students identify and discuss the ideas and images that appear in both the inner and outer stories. Ask them what effect they think the frame-story structure has on the novella.

FURTHER READING FOR THE TEACHER

- *Modern Critical Views: Edith Wharton*, edited by Harold Bloom, 1986, contains critical essays on *Ethan Frome* and the other works of Edith Wharton.
- *Ethan Frome: Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Context Criticism (A Norton Critical Edition)*, edited by Kristin Lauer and Cynthia Griffin Wolff, 1995, includes critical essays and background information along with the text of the novella.
- *Edith Wharton A to Z: The Essential Guide to the Life and Work* by Sarah Bird Wright and Clare Colquitt, 1999, includes both primary and secondary source material.

Media Links



Videos

The following film adaptation of the novella may help students visualize the wintry New England landscape:

- *Ethan Frome* (1992, 107 minutes), with Patricia Arquette; rated PG.
Students may enjoy watching a film adaptation of another Wharton novel to compare its settings and situations with those of *Ethan Frome*.
- *The Age of Innocence* (1993, 138 minutes), with Daniel Day-Lewis and Michelle Pfeiffer; rated PG; noteworthy for its authentic details of time and place



Audiocassettes

The following recordings can increase students' appreciation of Wharton's novels:

- *Ethan Frome* (Naxos Books), abridged
- *Ethan Frome* (Blackstone Audio), unabridged



Internet Connection

The following Web sites provide information about topics related to the novella or its author:

- This National Portrait Gallery Web site includes portraits of Edith Wharton and her contemporaries at <http://www.npg.ai.wsu/exh/wharton/whar3.htm>
- The homepage of the Edith Wharton Society Web site contains sources of information about the author and her works at <http://www.gonzaga.edu/faculty/campbell/wharton/index.html>
- The Mount Restoration homepage focuses on Wharton's grand New England home and provides links to other interesting and relevant sites at <http://www.edithwharton.org/index.html>

At the time this study guide went to press, the sites were in operation. Before assigning students to visit them, check to ensure that the sites still exist.



Further Reading for the Student

- *The Ghost Stories of Edith Wharton* by Edith Wharton, 1997, contains eleven spine-tingling tales of the supernatural.
- *Old New York: Four Novellas* by Edith Wharton, 1995, is a collection of works set in New York.
- *Edith Wharton: An Extraordinary Life* by Eleanor Dwight, 1999, is an illustrated biography of the writer and her world.
- *The Berkshires* by Bill Binzen, 1995, contains color photographs of the area in Massachusetts where Wharton lived.

Be sure to preview all media links to determine whether the material is appropriate for your class.

Teaching Options

Options for Motivating Students

Marriage and the Family in the Past

Prepare students for the view of marriage as a moral and as an economic institution.

- Ask students how life has changed for women in the last one hundred years. Help them recognize that until well into the twentieth century, in many cultures and among some social classes, few women were educated or expected to live independent lives.
- Have students compare divorce statistics for 1900 (or earlier, if possible) with present ones. Have students speculate about how people who lived a hundred years ago may have looked upon divorce. Discuss the reasons why divorce has become more acceptable in society as a whole.
- Tell students that men and women were economically dependent on each other when they had very separate and different roles, as they did on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century farms. A single man or woman would have had a hard time surviving alone on a farm.
- Point out that during the late nineteenth century, many people died at an early age. Ask students to discuss what options widows and orphans may have had if they lost a husband or a father and what factors may have affected those options.

Winter Wonderland

Explain to students that the setting of a work of fiction often mirrors the emotional state of its characters.

- Write the words “winter landscape” on the board and invite students to create a web of words that describe a winter scene. Encourage them to continue to add to the web words that they encounter as they read *Ethan Frome*.
- Have students brainstorm for emotions that are commonly associated with winter. Encourage them to generate positive as well as negative emotions.
- Suggest that students use print or online encyclopedias to research winter conditions in New England. They should be able to answer questions such as: What is the average annual

snowfall for most of the region during the winter? What is the average temperature? What is the coldest temperature ever recorded there? Where was it recorded? What was the heaviest snowfall? How does winter in New England compare with winter in other parts of the country?

Creating Word Pictures

Help students appreciate how vivid imagery breathes life into a story.

- Point out to students that writers often create word pictures—or images—to make a story lifelike. Read aloud the following example from *Ethan Frome*:

We came to an orchard of starved apple-trees writhing over a hillside among outcroppings of slate that nuzzled up through the snow like animals pushing out their noses to breathe (page 7).

- Ask students what feeling the passage evokes and what images contribute to this feeling. (Students may say that the feeling inspired by the words “starved,” “writhing,” and “pushing . . . to breathe” is one of a struggle for survival).
- Tell students to write their own descriptions of trees on a snow-covered hillside, using images to create a lifelike impression. After they share their descriptions with the class, tell students that the themes of *Ethan Frome* are reinforced by the images that Wharton uses.

Love and Marriage

Help students to understand the theme of extramarital relationships in the novella.

- Ask for a show of hands of students who believe that most people marry for love, and then ask for a show of hands of those who believe that most marry for security.
- Ask students what the responses suggest about the institution of marriage today.
- Explain to students that *Ethan Frome* shows the consequences of marrying for reasons other than love and of seeking love outside of marriage.

Meeting Individual Needs

The story line and realistic dialogue make Ethan Frome appropriate for average readers. The activities that follow will help you present the novella in ways that meet the needs and interests of all students.

Less-Proficient Readers

Help students understand the novella's shifts in time.

- Prepare students for the Beginning before they start reading it. Explain to students that after piecing together the stories told by Frome's neighbors, the unnamed narrator is telling the story of what happened to Ethan Frome. Point out that events in Chapter I occurred about twenty-four years earlier.
- Explain also that the novella contains flashbacks to events that occurred earlier than the previous twenty-four years. As a result, students will meet some characters at three or more different times during their lives.
- Pair gifted students with less-proficient readers to work together in small groups. After they read a chapter or a section, have the groups discuss the events presented in the section, telling when they occurred and explaining their relevance to the story.

English-Language Learners

Help students to understand the dialect and idioms used in the work.

- Explain that, to achieve a sense of realism, Wharton uses dialect of the time in which the novella was written. Write the following passage spoken by Zeena in Chapter II on the board:
“At this time o' night? You'll ketch your death. The fire's out long ago (page 22).”
- Point out that, at the time, a characteristic of New England dialect was the abbreviation of the word “of” with “o'.” Explain that “ketch” is the phonetic spelling of “catch,” and that the phrase “catch your death” means to get seriously ill.

- Help students translate the passage into Standard English. Encourage them to write down lines of dialect that are unfamiliar to them so that they can translate them later.

Encourage students to use other media to help them understand the story.

- Students may find it helpful to see the setting and the characters before they read the book. Have them view some of the opening scenes from the video production of *Ethan Frome*. Allow them to view the rest of the film after they have finished reading.
- Have students listen to an audiotape of the unabridged novella. Suggest that they experiment with listening to each chapter before and after they read it; then let them decide which way is most helpful to them in understanding the story.

Gifted and Talented

Have students investigate the levels of poverty in New England.

- The pockets of hardscrabble poverty that *Ethan Frome* depicts are less common in parts of New England today. Have students perform research on the New England region to determine which states have the highest per capita income, which have made the greatest economic gains in the last decade, and what the growth industries are for the region. Students should share their profiles of the New England states with the rest of the class.

Encourage students to contrast Edith Wharton's view of New England with that of other famous New England writers.

- Have students survey the works of women whose fiction has focused on the New England region. Two famous regional writers whose works were devoted to New England life were Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary Wilkins Freeman.
- Students should perform research on these two writers and analyze one of their best known works, comparing it with *Ethan Frome* from the standpoint of theme, characterization, and setting.

Assessment Options

Writing

Fact or Fiction?

- Have students write essays in which they compare and contrast the sledding accident in the novel with the accident described in the newspaper account “Fatal Coasting Accident.” They should use details from the novella to compare with those in the account. Have them use what they learn to draw their own conclusions about whether this article may have inspired Wharton to write *Ethan Frome*.

Famous Last Words

- The local graveyard at Starkfield figures prominently in the novella. Have students compose epitaphs for five of its characters. Remind them that old New England epitaphs frequently contained biographical information, quotations, brief poems, or words of advice.

Brain Drain

- Have students research some of the changes that took place in New England after the Civil War, including the flight from farms and the rise in urban populations. Have them use what they learn to identify and explain at least two events or details in the novella. For example, students may use their research to explain the narrator’s arrival to work on the powerhouse at Corbury Junction or Gow’s statement, “Most of the smart ones get away.”

Listening and Speaking

Having Their Say

- Have students form pairs to interview a character from the novel. Have each pair decide whether Ethan, Zeena, or Mattie will live the longest. Have them decide which partner will play the interviewer and which will play the character. Then have them stage an interview with the sole survivor. Invite students to perform their interviews for the class.

Making a Scene

- Have students dramatize the section of the novella in which Zeena discovers the broken pickle-dish. Volunteers should play the roles of Zeena, Ethan, and Mattie, role playing the scene with feeling and realism. Students can videotape the scene if they wish.

Viewing and Representing

A Winter Retreat

- Have students design a brochure or Web site that entices travelers to visit Starkfield, Massachusetts. Encourage them to use photographs, color, and typography, advertising the village as a winter retreat. Students should base the village’s attractions on facts about the setting given in the novella.

Picture It!

- Have students choose a landscape scene from the novella that stands out because of the vivid descriptive details. Then have them capture the scene artistically, using charcoal, watercolors, or whatever medium they feel best helps to capture the image. Students can give their pictures a title and display them if they wish.

Interdisciplinary Connections

Look to the Stars

- In Chapter I, the constellations the Dipper, Orion, Aldebaran, and Pleides are mentioned. In Chapter IX, Ethan Frome mentions Sirius. Have students perform research on these constellations to determine the time of year when they are visible and their locations in the nighttime sky.
- Have students share their findings with the class in an oral report supported by drawings or slides of the constellations.



Save students’ work for their portfolios.

Options for Using Related Readings

Related Readings	Making Connections to <i>Ethan Frome</i>
<p>The Hill Wife and An Old Man's Winter Night by Robert Frost (BLM page 32)</p>	<p>These poems show the effects of rural isolation on people in New England.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may wish to use these poems as a prereading activity before beginning the novella. Before they read, ask students to imagine what life might be like in rural New England on the basis of what they already know about the region. What images come to mind? Have students, as they read, note details about life in New England and the effect of these aspects on the characters in the poems. Have them compare and contrast the wife and the old man. After students have read <i>Ethan Frome</i>, lead a discussion on the similarities between the setting in Frost's poems and the setting in <i>Ethan Frome</i>. Ask students which poem they think is closest to Wharton's view of New England.
<p>Stolen Day by Sherwood Anderson (BLM page 33)</p>	<p>Feigned illness plays a part in this story, just as it does in <i>Ethan Frome</i>. Here, however, it is treated humorously.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This short story would work well as a postreading activity for <i>Ethan Frome</i>. Before students read, ask for a show of hands of those who have ever felt that they had symptoms of an illness after being preoccupied with thoughts about that illness. Ask them what they think might account for this. Explain that the power of suggestion sometimes can cause symptoms of a condition to develop when it they may not have existed before. Help students to identify parallels between Walter's behavior and Zeena's. Is Zeena acting, or are her illnesses real? How is the response of the narrator's family to his "illness" different from Ethan's response toward Zeena's?
<p>Fatal Coasting Accident from <i>The Berkshire Evening Eagle</i> (BLM page 34)</p>	<p>This article about a real sledding accident may have inspired the description of the accident in <i>Ethan Frome</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You may wish to use this article as a postreading activity for the novella. Before they read, tell students that writers of fiction often base their stories on real people and events. Explain that, in writing <i>Ethan Frome</i>, Edith Wharton likely based the climax, the sledding accident, on an incident that actually happened. Have students reread the section of Chapter IX that graphically describes the sledding accident. Then have them read the article, noting similarities and differences between the two accounts. Ask students whether they think Wharton used the facts to create her fiction and, if so, why she might have altered them. Finally, ask which account is the most compelling—Wharton's account or <i>The Berkshire Evening Eagle's</i>. Have them explain why.

Options for Using Related Readings

Related Readings	Making Connections to <i>Ethan Frome</i>
<p>Snow by Naomi Shihab Nye (BLM page 35)</p>	<p>In this poem, the speaker reminisces about going sledding with her younger brother on a snow-covered slope.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This poem might work well as a prereading activity for Chapter IX in which the sledding accident occurs. • Before they read, ask students what words they associate with sledding. You may wish to create a word web of the terms on the chalkboard. • After students read, discuss the emotions the speaker feels toward her brother and those her brother feels toward her during the sled ride. How are they different? • Ask students what they can infer about the family in the poem. How does the setting contribute to their inferences? Have students compare the use of the setting in the poem to that in <i>Ethan Frome</i>.
<p>A Farmer's Maid by Sybil Marshall</p> <p>The Dislike to Domestic Service by Clementina Black (BLM page 36)</p>	<p>These two readings provide a glimpse of the kind of domestic service performed by Mattie Silver.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These readings might work well as prereading activities for Chapter III, which describes Mattie's plight. • Before they read, tell students that these selections provide background information about the duties domestic workers were expected to perform in the nineteenth century and the attitudes of some toward domestic service. • Remind students to consider, as they read each selection, who is speaking and how the speaker's background may affect her views. • After they read, have students compare and contrast the two selections. Ask students which author gives more specific details and which takes a more general view of the situation and its context.

Answer Key

ACTIVE READING

Beginning—Chapter II

Starkfield: “deadness of the community”; “blazing blue sky”; “intense glitter”; “sunless cold”; “mute melancholy landscape”; “frozen woe”; “empty expanse of snow”; “gloom of the spruces”; “empty world”; “leafless trees”; “grey and lonely country”

Chapters III–V

Possible answers: **Causes-Effects**: *Ethan’s mother falls ill*—Zeena arrives to help; *Ethan is lonely after his mother dies*—Ethan marries Zeena; *Mattie’s father dies*—Mattie is left penniless; *Zeena needs someone to help her*—Mattie comes to Starkfield; *Zeena leaves to visit a doctor*—Ethan and Mattie are alone together; *Mattie sets the table in a special way*—Zeena’s favorite dish is broken

Chapters VI–VIII

Possible answers: **Event**: Zeena discovers the broken dish; **Event**: Zeena announces that she has hired a new girl and that Mattie must leave; **Event**: Ethan tells Mattie about Zeena’s decision; **Event**: Ethan decides to leave Zeena and join Mattie; **Event**: Ethan goes into town to get money from Hale; **Event**: Ethan realizes that he can’t deceive the Hales to get money to leave

Chapter IX

Climax: Ethan and Mattie are forced to part. *Ethan* controls the sled. *Mattie* convinces Ethan to drive the sled into a tree. *Zeena’s* jealousy drives Mattie away and alienates Ethan.

RESPONDING Beginning—Chapter II

Recall and Interpret

1. From other characters, he learns that Ethan had some kind of smash-up that prevented him from leaving Starkfield. This knowledge increases the narrator’s curiosity in wanting to find out the circumstances surrounding the accident.
2. “Plaintively ugly,” it looks forlorn. It is missing the “L,” which the narrator considers the true hearthstone, or center, of a New England farm. The loss of this important part of the house mirrors Ethan Frome’s weakened state.
3. Mattie is Zeena’s cousin who has come from Stamford to take care of Zeena. She is important to Ethan because she is a kindred spirit who brings him happiness.
4. Zeena is dissatisfied with Mattie’s lack of housekeeping skills, and she is determined to see to it that Mattie leaves.
5. She does not leave the key under the mat as usual. She is suspicious and wants to know when they came in.

Evaluate and Connect

6. The townspeople’s varying stories and reluctance to discuss the details with the narrator suggest New Englanders’ distrust of outsiders. Students might reply that in their reticence, the townspeople are protecting both Ethan and Zeena, who are fellow townspeople.
7. Students might say that Ethan’s entrapment in an isolated place and in an unhappy marriage make him pitiable. Others may say that his ability to appreciate the natural beauty that surrounds him in spite of difficult circumstances and unfulfilled dreams makes him an admirable character. Still others might feel his attention to his sick wife’s cousin makes him an object of scorn.

RESPONDING Chapters III–V

Recall and Interpret

1. She seemed friendly, efficient, and competent. He suddenly dreaded the idea of being alone. If his mother had died in spring, perhaps he would not have been subjected to the loneliness that the cold winter helped bring about.
2. Zeena became quiet, unhealthy, and quarrelsome. Ethan was unable to persuade her to leave Starkfield for a larger city.

3. Ethan wants to collect money that Mr. Hale owes him. He falsely told Zeena that he couldn’t take her to the train because he had to collect it, and he wishes to cover up his lie. Hale’s statement saddens Ethan because it makes him think of the happiness that eludes him and Mattie.
4. He sees Ned and Ruth kissing, and sees a headstone with his name on it. He envies Ned and Ruth for not having to hide their happiness and wonders whether he and Zeena will have the same epitaph when they die.
5. Mattie tries to make it pretty and festive by using Zeena’s prized pickle-dish. The dish gets broken. Students may respond that the broken pieces symbolize either Ethan’s marriage that is broken beyond repair or the breach in the relationship between Mattie and Zeena.

Evaluate and Connect

6. Some students might say that doing so might have spoiled the dreamlike moment for him. Others might say that Ethan’s keeping his distance from Mattie heightens the attraction between them.
7. Students may say that the passage foreshadows the trouble that follows the breaking of the pickle-dish and Zeena’s willful reaction.

RESPONDING Chapters VI–VIII

Recall and Interpret

1. He felt joyful because he could now imagine a different life. The feeling is not likely to last because Zeena is expected to return and will find out about the broken dish.
2. Zeena plans to hire a new girl and to send Mattie away. At first Ethan says that this will never happen. Later he feels hopeless and considers running away with Mattie. Zeena is aware of the relationship and seeks to end it.
3. She discovers the broken dish. This discovery suggests that she will surely send Mattie away.
4. Ethan can stay with Zeena or run away with Mattie. Convention, propriety, and lack of money make it hard for him to leave, but his feelings for Mattie make it hard for him to consider life without her.
5. He plans to visit Mr. Hale to get the money that will make it possible for him to leave Zeena. However, he decides that he cannot deceive the Hales by accepting money under false pretences. This decision reveals the moral code by which he governs his behavior.

Evaluate and Connect

6. Ethan Frome chose honor over his love for Mattie in his decision not to take money from the Hales.
7. Students may characterize the statement as being ironic. Mrs. Hale, when she makes the comment, does not realize that Ethan has deep feelings for Zeena’s cousin.

RESPONDING Chapter IX

Recall and Interpret

1. They go to a place where they once picnicked, and they reminisce about happier times. Ethan is openly defiant toward Zeena and ignores her wishes.
2. He wants to put off taking Mattie to the station and decides to take the sled ride that they had planned to take earlier.
3. Mattie suggests crashing the sled into the elm so that neither will have to go on living without the other.
4. He means that he knows that he can hit the tree and kill them both. He sees his wife’s face and flinches, causing the sled to veer.
5. She describes his life as a living death because his chance for happiness is gone and he has nothing to live for. Students may agree or disagree with this assessment.

Answer Key (continued from previous page)

Evaluate and Connect

6. It creates suspense. It also prepares readers for what will be found inside the house.
7. Some students may think that death would be preferable to the situation in which Ethan, Zeena, and Mattie find themselves. Others may say that it is never justifiable to take one's own life.

RELATED READINGS

The Hill Wife/An Old Man's Winter Night

1. She fears finding a bat or other living creature in her house because it is so cold and dark when she and her husband are not there. She fears the potential violence of strangers, and she also fears their possible judgment. She fears winter because of the isolation and loneliness it brings.
2. She runs away, and her husband tries to find her. When he can't find her, he realizes that marriages can end for reasons other than death.
3. The title suggests that the conditions and emotions described are not unique to one person but rather are experienced by many married women who live in the hills.
4. He is old and tired. He clomps around the house. He is barely able to take care of himself or his house, and he has trouble remembering things.
5. The wife may remind readers of Zeena or of Ethan, both of whom seem unhappy to be living in a cold, isolated place. The difficulties of rural life put a strain on Zeena and Ethan's marriage just as they do on the marriage of the couple in the poem. The old man may remind readers of Ethan because the farm he owns has become burdensome.

Stolen Day

1. He knows a boy on his street named Walter who has the illness and who is allowed to fish all day.
2. He tells her that he aches but not that he has inflammatory rheumatism. She is sympathetic but preoccupied. She sends him to bed but doesn't ensure that he is all right.
3. He is enjoying imagining the attention he would get if he died. He bases his imaginings on the death of a real child, who had drowned.
4. He catches a big fish. The teacher has told his father that he went home from school because he wasn't feeling well, and the father wants to know what's wrong with him. They laugh at the boy's prank.
5. The character's family knows that he is not sick, and laugh at him. Zeena's family is victimized by her use of sickness to get her way. One reason for the difference may be that it's easier to laugh at a child's behavior than at an adult's.

Fatal Coasting Accident

1. Miss Crosby was steering the sled, but Mansuit Schmitt claimed responsibility for the accident.
2. Most people would have been horrified and upset because so many young people were killed or injured.
3. The good condition of the road enabled the sled to go so fast. The objects were not damaged, but the people were.
4. Because the sleds were able to go so fast and because other riders had already come close to having accidents, the townspeople could have foreseen the accident and may have been able to prevent it by prohibiting coasting on the hill.
5. The effects of the crash on the town and specific details about the injuries are described in the newspaper account but not in the novella. The accident's effect on the future lives of the surviving victims is given only in the novella.

Snow

1. Someone is crying a "blizzard of sobs." The word *blizzard* might also be used to concretely describe the snowfall.

2. The snow is deeper than usual, and it is coming down more heavily. They are going sledding anyway because they want to get away from their troubled parents.
3. They are pretending to have a good time but are not happy.
4. Students may say that the snow is a symbol of the coldness in their household. The speaker mentions a "drifting accumulation" of silence between father and son.
5. Similarities include the winter setting, the troubled relationships between the characters, and the sled rides taken to escape the problems at home.

A Farmer's Maid/The Dislike to Domestic Service

1. The benefits include experiencing new things and receiving training. Also, the work is easier than farming. A parent might think that a child's lot would be improved by sending her into domestic service.
2. Servants had to get up early, work hard under poor conditions, and did not lead independent lives. Employers appeared to have little respect for them. If they had had respect for them, they would have treated them differently.
3. A present-day domestic worker in the United States would be better paid and more respected. Children would be protected by child-labor laws. However, some domestic workers today may not lead independent lives.
4. They were not protected or sheltered from adult realities. Today children are protected by laws relating to education and employment. Modern conveniences have made life easier for both adults and children.
5. Mattie probably worked long hours and performed hard tasks. However, Ethan respected her and helped her in her labors even when Zeena did not.

TEST

Recall and Interpret

1. b 2. a 3. d 4. b 5. a
6. No one but Ethan knows the entire story, and Ethan does not tell it. Other characters know various pieces.
7. He admires her and fears being alone the winter after his mother dies.
8. She is fun loving, cheerful, and likes to dance.
9. He says that he cannot drive her to the station because he must stay to collect money that is owed to him, but what he really wants is to be alone with Mattie.
10. He changes places with her because he wants to feel her arms around him.

Evaluate and Connect (any 2)

1. The facts include his poverty, Zeena's stubbornness, his unwillingness to deceive the Hales, and his sense of responsibility toward Zeena.
2. The rural, wintry New England setting is cold and bleak. Farms sit alone on hillsides surrounded by pines, granite outcroppings, and fields of snow. The isolation makes Ethan lonely, which impels him to marry Zeena though he does not love her. The hard work of farming and the poverty contribute to the tragic ending of the novella.
3. He likes how she makes him feel. She loves the facts that she feels safe with him and that he is kind to her.
4. Instead of having escaped with the youthful, vibrant Mattie, Ethan must remain where he is and watch Mattie turn into a woman who is as bitter and scolding as the wife he wanted to leave. Zeena, who had been sickly and had relied on Mattie, must now act as a caretaker for her.
5. Both Mattie and Ethan want to escape their stifling situations and experience love and passion, but the conventions of the time prevent them. The living death of which Wilson speaks is their knowledge that although the possibility for it exists, they cannot attain happiness.

Assessment Rubrics

Use these criteria as guidelines for evaluating students' performance on Assessment Options activities (page 7).

Writing

Fact or Fiction? *In the comparison-contrast essay, students should*

- compare and contrast the accident in the novel with the accident in the news account
- state whether the event might have inspired Wharton
- identify important points of comparison rather than superficial ones
- use examples and other evidence to support statements
- present ideas in a logical order, using transitions and other relational terms
- demonstrate competency in grammar, mechanics, and usage

Famous Last Words *In their epitaphs, the students should*

- demonstrate an understanding of the main characters
- provide relevant details, such as quotations or suitable poems
- employ a tone suitable for the occasion

Brain Drain *In their research reports, the students should*

- focus on changes in New England after the Civil War
- identify at least two such changes
- relate those changes to details in the novel
- support general statements with quotations or examples

Listening and Speaking

Having Their Say *In their interviews, the students should*

- provide questions and answers about one main character
- demonstrate an understanding of that character's point of view
- use the facts of the story accurately
- hold the attention of the audience

Making a Scene *In their dramatizations, the students should*

- take the point of view of one character
- defend and explain one of the character's actions
- use appropriate facial expressions, movements, and tone of voice

Viewing and Representing

A Winter Retreat *In their travel brochures, students should*

- base the advertising information on details from the setting
- use appropriate marketing and promotional language
- use artistic elements, such as color and form, which communicate meaning

Picture It! *In their pictures, students should*

- depict a vividly described scene
- accurately portray what is stated or implied in the description
- use creativity and imagination

Interdisciplinary Connections

Look to the Stars *For their reports students should*

- describe the important stars in the constellations
- provide bibliographic sources for the information
- support the presentation with graphics or other media
- deliver the report in an engaging way that appeals to the audience

Meet Edith Wharton



From a childhood and youth of complete intellectual isolation . . . I passed, in my early thirties, into an atmosphere of the rarest understanding, the richest and most varied mental comradeship.

—Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance*

Edith Newbold Jones, the daughter of a wealthy New York family, was born into society on January 24, 1862. She grew up New York and Europe. She was educated by private tutors and by excursions into her father’s library. A shy redheaded girl, Wharton received little support from her parents when she began writing at a young age.

“Incurably Ugly” At twenty-three, Wharton married a friend of the family, Edward “Teddy” Wharton. Like her, he had enjoyed a life of wealth and leisure. However, his main interests, unlike hers, were sports and outdoor activities. The Whartons spent summers in Newport, Rhode Island, where they owned a house called Land’s End. Wharton once called it “incurably ugly,” and hired an interior decorator, Ogden Codman Jr., to help her improve it. Later, the two of them wrote a book, *The Decoration of Houses*—Wharton’s first published book.

This was the start of a distinguished publishing career. Wharton next produced a short-story

collection and a novella and then turned her attention to a nonwriting project—a house called the Mount, built in Lenox, Massachusetts. The Mount was her refuge, her window onto New England society, and her home in the United States for more than a decade.

Her Literary Life Wharton’s first major successful novel, *The House of Mirth*, focused on wealthy New York society. It brought her swift recognition as a major literary figure. Two years later, Wharton moved to France, where she continued writing and developed her friendships with other writers, including the celebrated American expatriate Henry James. As her literary life began to flower, her personal life grew troubled. Her husband suffered from mental illness, and he and Wharton divorced.

She eventually sold her beloved home in Lenox and decided to remain in France. While there, she wrote some of her best-known works, including *Ethan Frome*, *The Age of Innocence*, and *The Buccaneers*. Though it may seem odd that *Ethan Frome*, a novel so closely associated with New England, should have been written in France, Wharton explained it this way:

For years I had wanted to draw life as it really was in the derelict mountain villages of New England, a life even in my time, and a thousandfold more a generation earlier, utterly unlike that seen through the rose colored spectacles of my predecessors.

Later Life and Awards Wharton was living in France during World War I and became an avid supporter of the Allies. In 1916, a grateful France awarded her the cross of the Légion d’honneur. Seven years later, she was named the first female grand officer of the Legion. She won other awards as well. In 1921, she became the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction; and two years later, Yale University conferred upon her an honorary degree. She later received a Pulitzer Prize for Drama. When she died in 1937, Wharton had received more honors than any other American woman writer.

Introducing the Novel

Few books can have so surprised an author's public as did Ethan Frome in 1911. For more than a decade Mrs. Wharton's fiction had dealt exclusively with metropolitan and cosmopolitan society, with a world whose pivots were money and luxury and art and beauty; . . . yet in Ethan Frome she accomplished something as bleak and simple as a sketch of Sarah Orne Jewett.

—E. K. Brown,
"Edith Wharton: The Art of the Novel"

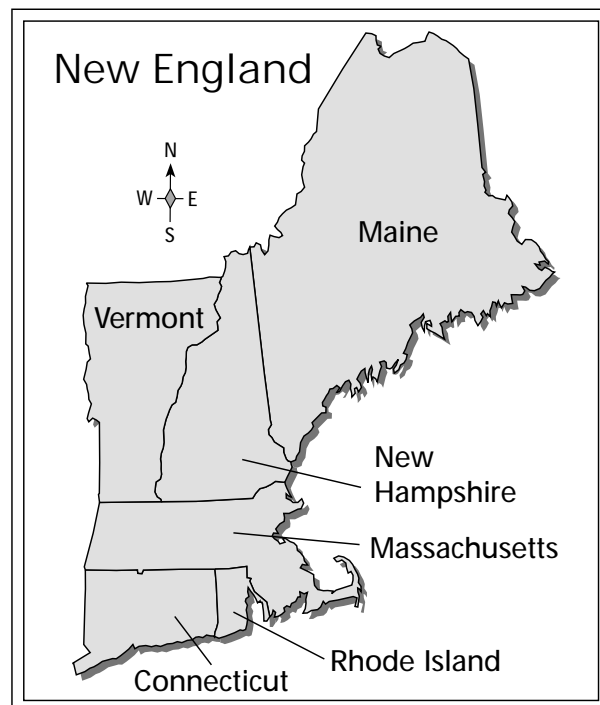
BACKGROUND

Although it is often called an American classic, *Ethan Frome* was originally written in French. Wharton had hired a tutor to help her improve her command of the language. Too polite to correct her speech, the tutor suggested that she produce written exercises. The result was the first version of the story, written in a small black notebook. Not only was the original French version much shorter than the final English one but the main character was named Hart, not Ethan, and the ending was completely different. With the French version, however, Wharton had established the framework for the novella.

This work probably surprised Wharton's readers. After all, she was a wealthy woman who frequently wrote about characters who belonged to her privileged social class. Nevertheless, she had spent a decade living in Massachusetts, where she had certainly passed through many small and isolated villages similar to Starkfield, where *Ethan Frome* is set. She saw the conditions in these places and imagined what it might be like to live in them.

THE TIME AND PLACE

As Wharton suggests in *Ethan Frome*, village populations in New England were declining at the end of the 1800s. Several reasons accounted for this decline. First, in New England, farming has always been difficult. The landscape is hilly and rocky, the soil is infertile, and the growing season is short. Many people who wanted to farm began to move west, where conditions were more favorable. Second, factories were springing up all over New England, and especially in Massachusetts. By the end of the century, approximately one-third of the nation's woolen goods and one half of its shoes were produced in that state. The geography lent itself to industrialization, since Massachusetts had many rivers whose energy could be harnessed to power factories. The map below shows the six states that make up the New England region.



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Did You Know?

A typical nineteenth-century New England farm had to serve many purposes. It had to have land on which to grow crops, shelter for the family and the animals, and storage facilities for food and tools.

A New England farmstead often included many connected buildings: a main house, where the family lived; a barn or two; an icehouse, built to store ice that was cut from frozen ponds; a stable or carriage shed or both, to

hold horses, wagons, and buggies; a chicken shed, a sheep barn, or a pigsty; an apple barn to store apples or a sap house to make maple syrup; and a silo or corncrib to store fodder for the animals. The construction and maintenance of these buildings added to the farmer's work. Families who could not perform this work were not likely to thrive, so they were often happy to take in distant relatives or other live-in helpers.

CRITIC'S CORNER

In its spare, chilling re-creation of rural isolation, hardscrabble poverty, and wintry landscape . . . Ethan Frome overwhelms the reader as a drama of irresistible necessity.

—Alfred Kazin

Before You Read

Ethan Frome Beginning—Chapter II

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Consider the adage, “Believe half of what you see and none of what you hear.” What do you think it means? Do you follow that piece of advice? Why or why not?

Share Ideas

With a partner, share an instance in which the reputation of a person whom you knew was based on hearsay that turned out to be untrue. What were the circumstances? What lesson did you learn? What do you think makes people embellish the truth?

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out what the townspeople say about Ethan Frome and why he captures the narrator’s attention.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

In writing *Ethan Frome*, Wharton relied on two tried and true literary devices: the frame story and the flashback. A **frame story** is a story within a story. The “frame” is an outer story that precedes and follows a more important inner story. In *Ethan Frome*, the outer story is the narration by a visitor to Starkfield. He tells how he put together the facts about Ethan Frome’s accident. The inner story that relates the events leading up to the climactic accident is told in flashbacks. A **flashback** is an interruption of chronological sequence by the interjection of events that occurred earlier. Writers use flashbacks to explain what happened previously, giving readers information that may help explain the main events of the story. Sometimes a writer will signal a flashback with a transitional word or phrase, but at other times readers must depend on clues. Wharton uses flashback frequently in *Ethan Frome*.

Whose Story Is This?

Every work of fiction has a narrator, a “voice” that tells the story. In *Ethan Frome*, the narrator of the frame tale is an engineer who is visiting Starkfield on a job assignment. In the Beginning he tells the story from the **first-person point of view**, referring to himself as *I*. The reader knows only what he knows. However, when Chapter I begins, the point of view shifts to the **third-person limited**, and the thoughts and feelings of one character exclusively—Ethan, referred to as *he*, because the reader is seeing the events through his eyes.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

aggrieved [ə grēvd’] *adj.* troubled (p. 6)

conspicuously [kən spik’ ū əs lē] *adv.* noticeably or strikingly (p. 1)

degenerate [di jen’ər it] *adj.* inferior (p. 2)

detachment [di tach’mənt] *n.* a standing apart; aloofness (p. 3)

obstinately [ob’stə nit lē] *adv.* stubbornly; inflexibly (p. 15)

perceptible [pər sep’tə bəl] *adj.* noticeable (p. 2)

plaintive [plān’tiv] *adj.* mournful; sad (p. 14)

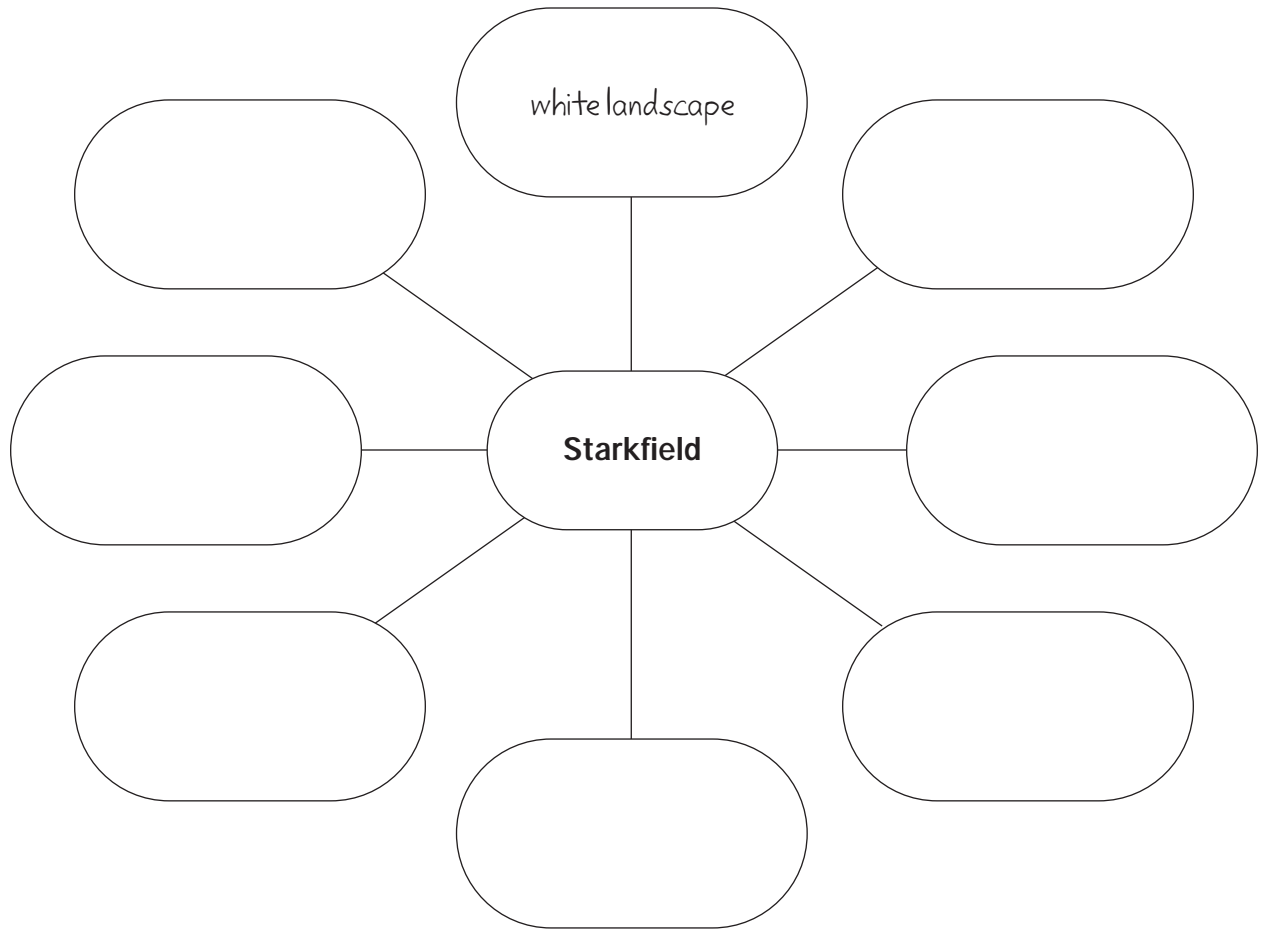
reticent [ret’ə sənt] *adj.* restrained or reserved, especially in speech (p. 4)

taciturnity [tas’ə tur’nə tē] *n.* silence or extreme reserve; unwillingness to speak (p. 2)

Active Reading

Ethan Frome Beginning—Chapter II

The setting of *Ethan Frome* is as important as the characters. In fact, some critics have said that the setting of the novella is a character. The very name of the village, “Starkfield,” suggests barrenness and harshness. As you read the opening chapters, pay attention to the author’s descriptions of the setting. What atmosphere does Wharton create? Using the organizer below, record words and phrases that describe the setting.



Responding

Ethan Frome Beginning—Chapter II

Personal Response

What are your initial feelings about Ethan Frome, the protagonist? What details from this section of the novella helped shape your feelings?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What does the narrator learn about Frome from other characters? What effect does this knowledge have on the narrator?

2. What is Ethan's house like? What part is missing, and why does this strike the narrator as important?

3. Who is Mattie Silver and why is her presence so important to Ethan Frome?

4. Why is Zeena dissatisfied with Mattie? How does this dissatisfaction affect Zeena's behavior toward her?

5. What does Zeena fail to do when Ethan brings Mattie home from the dance? What might have been her motive for doing it?

Responding

Ethan Frome Beginning—Chapter II

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

6. At the story's beginning, the narrator says that each person's story about Ethan Frome was different. Later he describes the reluctance of the townspeople to discuss the story. What does this behavior imply about New Englanders' attitudes toward outsiders? Are they protecting Zeena or Ethan Frome, do you think?

7. Think about your response to the **Focus Activity** on page 16. Based on Ethan Frome's own words and behavior in the novella so far, what image of him is emerging in your mind? Explain your response.

Literature and Writing

Descriptive Writing

Review your **Active Reading** web on page 17. Then write a paragraph describing Starkfield, Massachusetts as you visualize it. Pretend that you are describing the place to someone who has not been there. Feel free to use the descriptive words from the activity as well as others that may occur to you.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Throughout this section, the words and phrases that Wharton uses to describe the bleak but beautiful New England landscape mirror the emotional state of Ethan Frome. In your group, analyze the imagery and descriptive words used to create the setting to determine how they reflect Ethan Frome's emotional state at this point in the novella. Decide whether the setting described in this part of the novel actually functions as a character as many critics contend.

Music Connection

Work with a group to put together a sound track for Chapter II. First, make a list of the most important scenes in the chapter. Then discuss what songs or instrumental music you would select for the various scenes. Try to choose selections that capture the mood of the scenes.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

Ethan Frome Chapters III–V

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Recall an instance when you were tempted to do something that you might later have regretted. What prevented you from doing it? How did you feel afterwards?

Journal

In your journal, write a paragraph about an instance in which your self-control prevented you from doing something you might have regretted. What was the situation, and how difficult was the challenge? If you had it to do over, would you respond in the same way? Why or why not?

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out what happens when Ethan and Mattie find themselves alone for the first time.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

The American elm that plays a central role in the climax of *Ethan Frome* was once the tree of choice for urban landscapers across the United States. With its graceful fan-shaped crown, the elm attained heights of one hundred feet or more, providing an abundance of shade along city streets. In addition, it tolerated air pollution, poor soil, and de-icing salt during the winter. Its range across the eastern half of the United States was extensive until Dutch elm disease struck in the 1930s. The scourge wiped out an estimated 90 percent of these beautiful trees. Efforts at developing a hybrid have been successful, but the beauty and grace that the American elm contributed to the nation's urban landscape is lost forever.

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is an author's use of hints or clues to prepare readers for an event that will occur later in the story. For example, in *Ethan Frome*, the big elm is referred to at least twice before it appears in the last chapter of the novella: on page 18, when Mattie says that Ned Hale and Ruth Varnum came near running into it at the bottom of the hill, and on page 37, when Ethan says he'd be scared to sled down Corbury road because of the "ugly corner" where the big elms stands. As you read, look for other instances of foreshadowing that hint of what is to come.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

constraint [kən strānt'] *n.* holding back of natural feelings; forced or unnatural manner (p. 36)

discomfiture [dis kum'fi chər] *n.* confusion; embarrassment (p. 31)

eloquence [el'ə kwəns] *n.* forceful or persuasive speech (p. 33)

indenture [in den'chər] *v.* to bind (a person) by contract to serve another person for a stated period of time (p. 24)

inevitable [i nev'ə tə bəl] *adj.* unable to be avoided (p. 29)

obliterate [ə blit'ə rāt'] *v.* to remove all traces of; to blot out (p. 36)

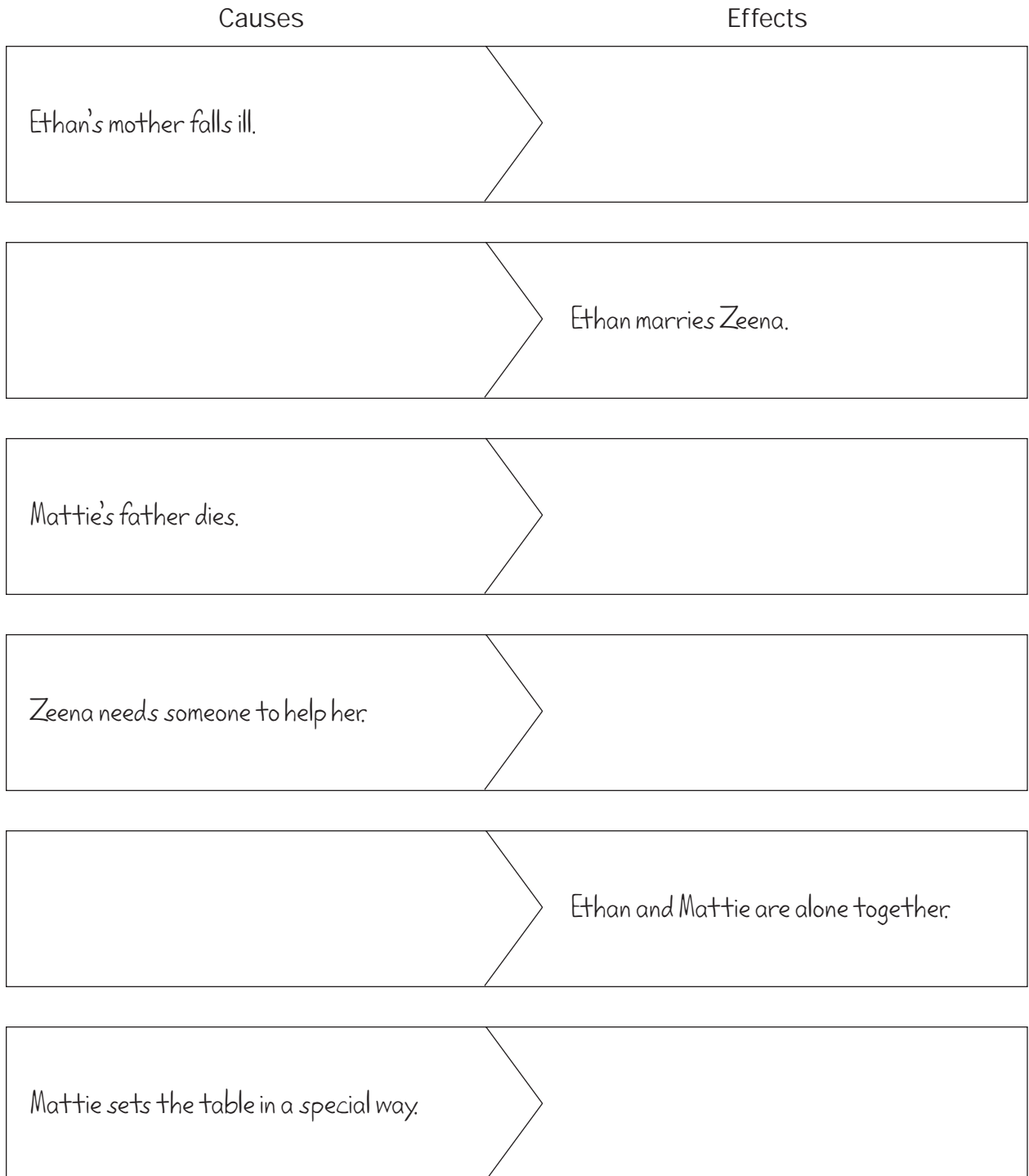
scintillating [sint'əl ā' tɪŋ] *adj.* brilliant; sparkling (p. 23)

spectral [spek'trəl] *adj.* ghostly (p. 39)

Active Reading

Ethan Frome Chapters III-V

In novels, events happen for a reason. They have causes. They also have effects that move the plot forward. As you read these chapters, think about causes and effects. Fill in the diagram below as you read.



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Responding

Ethan Frome Chapters III-V

Personal Response

Were you surprised that Zeena left Ethan and Mattie at home alone? Why or why not?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What was Zeena like when Ethan first met her? Why did Ethan ask her to stay? What difference might it have made if his mother had died in spring?

2. In what way did Zeena change after marriage? What effect did Zeena's behavior have on Ethan's future plans?

3. What does Ethan want from Mr. Hale and why? What effect does Mr. Hale's statement that he is fixing up a house for Ned and Ruth have on Ethan? Why?

4. What two sights does Ethan notice on his way home, and what is his response to each?

5. How does Mattie set the dinner table? What gets broken, and what might it symbolize?

Responding

Ethan Frome Chapters III–V

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

6. Think about your response to the **Focus Activity** on page 20. Why do you think Ethan did not express his feelings for Mattie when the two were alone?

7. What function does the following passage serve in relation to the plot? “[B]ut since the previous night a vague dread had hung on his [Ethan’s] sky-line. It was formed of Zeena’s obstinate silence, Mattie’s sudden look of warning, of the memory of just such fleeting imperceptible signs as those which told him, on certain stainless mornings, that before night there would be rain (page 24).”

Literature and Writing

Analyzing Character

Zeena’s cold, quarrelsome, complaining character might be associated with the wintry Starkfield landscape. Using Mattie Silver as Zeena’s foil, write a paragraph describing the season that you would associate with Mattie’s personality. Use examples from these chapters to support your point of view.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Is Ethan Frome to blame for his plight—that of being trapped in a loveless marriage and having to give up his aspiration to study engineering, or is he a victim of circumstance, bound by family tradition? Does Mattie Silver represent his last chance to attain happiness, or does his liaison with her represent another instance of poor judgment on his part? Debate these issues in your groups.

Performing

With a partner, prepare to enact of one of the following scenes:

- *The scene just before and during dinner.* The person who plays Ethan should reveal Ethan’s jealousy about a possible visitor and what happens after Zeena’s name is mentioned.
- *The scene just after the pickle-dish breaks.* The person who plays Mattie should show her fear, and the one who plays Ethan should show his sudden determination to take charge.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

Ethan Frome Chapters VI–VIII

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Have you ever had to make a difficult decision and felt pulled in opposite directions? What helped you to arrive at the decision?

Quickwrite

Jot down the strategies you use that help you make difficult decisions.

Setting a Purpose

Read to discover what motivates Ethan Frome to make a very difficult decision.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

In the mid-nineteenth century, medicine was extremely primitive by today's standards, especially for women. Many doctors had little or no formal training, and women's complaints were considered either to be related to childbearing or of psychological origin. Out of modesty, many women would not discuss issues openly with their physicians; nor did they submit to thorough examinations. Worse yet, prescribed medicines often contained little besides alcohol or addictive painkillers. People could order medications by mail, which they might take for years, convinced of their effectiveness. In many instances, however, the patients were getting worse rather than better.

Plot Structure

In most stories, the plot follows a predictable pattern. It begins with the **exposition**, or the introduction of the characters, setting, and conflict. Then it proceeds to the **rising action**, or the events that result from the conflict. These events build up to a final **climax**, or turning point, before the climax ends in **resolution**. As you read this section of the book, try to identify the stages of the plot as they unfold.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

almshouse [ä'mz' hous'] *n.* publicly supported home for the poor; poorhouse (p. 47)

destitute [des' tə tōōt'] *adj.* lacking the necessities of life; in absolute want (p. 59)

incessant [in ses' ənt] *adj.* continuing without interruption; unceasing (p. 55)

inexorable [i nek' sər ə bəl] *adj.* unchangeable; unyielding (p. 56)

pauper [pō' pər] *n.* a very poor person (p. 48)

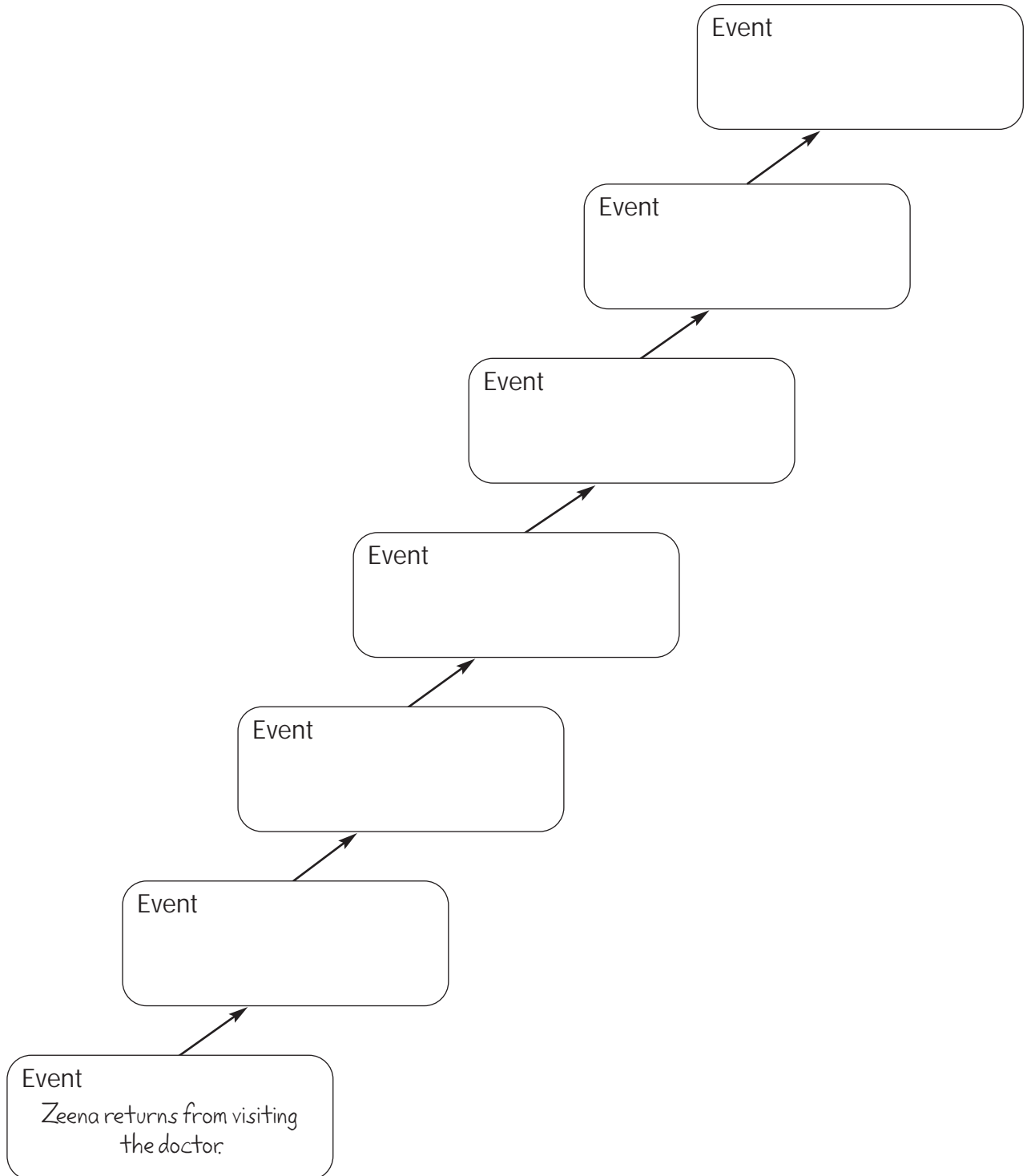
squalid [skwol' id] *adj.* having a gloomy, wretched, poverty-stricken appearance (p. 43)

stoicism [stō' ə siz' əm] *n.* indifference to pleasure or pain; impassivity (p. 44)

Active Reading

Ethan Frome Chapters VI–VIII

In this section of the novella, the rising action continues to build toward the climax. Use the boxes below to keep track of the events as they occur.



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Responding

Ethan Frome Chapters VI–VIII

Personal Response

For which character do you have the most sympathy? Why?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. How did Ethan feel the morning after spending the evening with Mattie, and what contributed to this feeling? Do you think the feeling will last? Why or why not?

2. What plan does Zeena have when she returns? How does Ethan react at first? What do you think is Zeena's true motive for dismissing Mattie?

3. What discovery does Zeena make? What does this suggest that she will do?

4. What two courses of action can Ethan take? What forces make the decision difficult?

5. Why does Ethan decide to visit Mr. Hale? What does Ethan's change of heart reveal about him?

Responding

Ethan Frome Chapters VI–VIII

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

6. Review your answer to the **Focus Activity** on page 24. Which of the two emotions prompted Ethan Frome to choose not to take advantage of the Hales' sympathy?

7. What does the author suggest by Mrs. Hale's statement that she didn't know what Zeena would have done if she hadn't had Ethan to look after her? Is Mrs. Hale aware of Ethan Frome's predicament at the time?

Literature and Writing

Analyzing Values

In this section of the novella, both Ethan and Zeena make separate references to things or ideals that they value most. Write a paragraph that compares and contrasts these things. What does this indicate about the characters and their relationship to each other?

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Reread the parts of Chapter VIII in which Ethan decides whether to leave Zeena and go with Mattie. In your group, discuss his arguments with himself and his decision-making process. What factors might he be overlooking?

Health Science Connection

Some illnesses that afflict human beings are psychological in nature and are not necessarily caused by physical ailments. Do you think that Zeena's ailments are caused by her state of mind? Using the Internet and other sources, research the topic of psychosomatic illnesses. Based on the character profile of Zeena, determine whether she might be a victim of these illnesses. Present a brief report to the class, setting forth your position.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

Ethan Frome Chapter IX

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Is there such a thing as an “impossible situation?” Why might one believe that there is no such thing as an impossible situation?

Journal

In your journal, describe a situation that could be considered impossible or unbearable. Then try identify some strategies for coping with that situation.

Setting a Purpose

Read to learn how Ethan and Mattie arrive at a shocking solution to their problem.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

The spinal cord is the bundle of nerves that extends from the base of the brain to the waist and relays messages from the brain to the rest of the body. When the spinal cord is damaged, messages can't be relayed properly, and full or partial paralysis results. This condition is called Spinal Cord Injury, or SCI, and it can be caused either by an accident or a disease. Although people who have SCI may experience some improvement within the first year and a half of the injury, the vast majority of those who suffer from the condition do not heal significantly after that time.

Tragedy

A tragedy is a drama in which the main character suffers a downfall as a result of a fatal character flaw, error in judgment, or force beyond human control, such as fate. Traditionally, the tragic hero is a person of high rank, who, out of an exaggerated sense of power or pride, violates a human, natural, or divine law. By breaking the law, the hero poses a threat to society and causes suffering to family members, friends, and associates.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

exaltation [eg' zôl tã' shən] *n.* feeling of great rapture or well-being (p. 68)

imploring [im plôr' ing] *adj.* asking earnestly (p. 62)

inarticulate [in' är tik' yə lit] *adj.* not clearly expressed (p. 64)

lineaments [lin' ē mənt] *n.* features (p. 70)

querulous [kwər' ə ləs] *adj.* whining or complaining (p. 71)

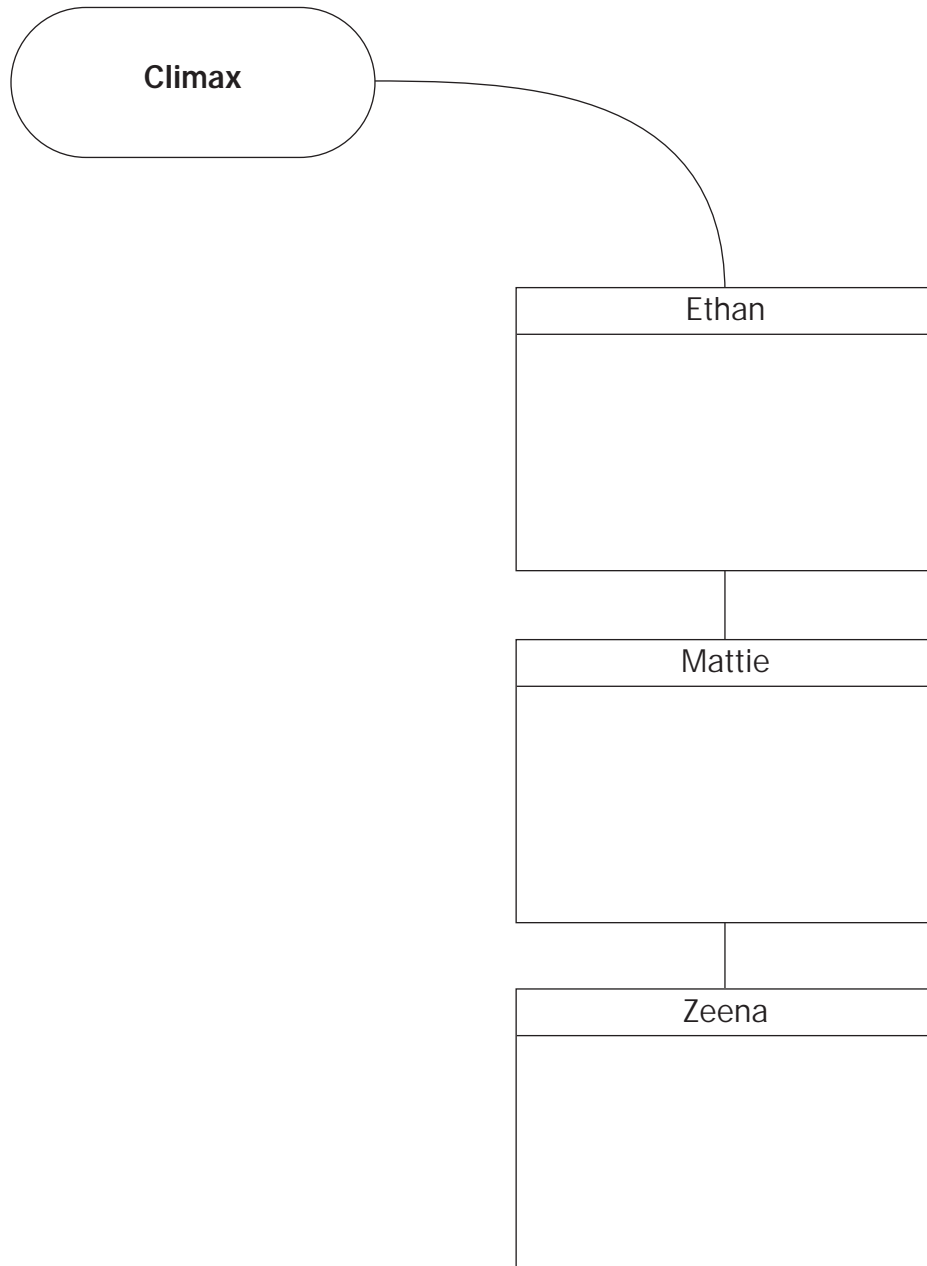
slatternly [slat' ərn lē] *adj.* neglected and dirty (p. 71)

uncouth [un kōōth'] *adj.* odd or clumsy (p. 64)

Active Reading

Ethan Frome Chapter IX

The climax of the novella occurs in this chapter. Use the organizer below to describe the climax and to note how each of the main characters contributes to it.



Responding

Ethan Frome Chapter IX

Personal Response

Describe the emotions that ran through your mind as you read the final five pages. Were you surprised, or did you expect this ending?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Where do Ethan and Mattie first stop on their ride, and how do they act toward each other?

2. What is Ethan's motive for stopping at the crest of the Corbury Road? What is their first ride down together like?

3. What idea does Mattie suggest and why?

4. What does Ethan mean when he says, "I know we can fetch it"? What image does he suddenly see, and how does he react?

5. How does Mrs. Hale describe Ethan Frome's life after the accident? Why does she make this assessment of him?

Responding

Ethan Frome Chapter IX

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

6. In the beginning of the novella, Ethan opens the door to his house for the narrator, but the narrator does not describe what he sees until the final chapter. How does this technique affect the reader?

7. The last lines in the book suggest that the Fromes in the graveyard might actually be luckier than the ones in the house. Do you agree or not, and why?

Literature and Writing

Whom Do You Blame?

Who or what is responsible for the outcome of this novella? Write a few paragraphs explaining who or what caused the conditions that the narrator observes in Ethan Frome's house.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Review the list of actions that you generated in the **Focus Activity** on page 28. Within your small group, debate whether the main characters in *Ethan Frome* found themselves in an impossible situation. Consider what alternatives might have been open to them. Do you agree with the words of Mrs. Hale that “[I]f she’d ha’ died, Ethan might ha’ lived.” Why or why not?

Internet Connection

Use the Internet to find out more about Edith Wharton and *Ethan Frome*. Try to find critics’ comments about the novella, Wharton’s comments about the book, and readers’ responses to the work.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Robert Frost

The Hill Wife and An Old Man's Winter Night

Before You Read

Focus Question

What are some of the fears that a woman living in the country might have?

Background

Robert Frost (1874–1963) received four Pulitzer Prizes and was invited to read at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy. In these two poems, he explores the emotions associated with the New England countryside.

Responding to the Reading

1. What are some of the feelings that the wife has about where she lives, and what causes those feelings?

2. What does the wife do finally, and what is the husband's reaction?

3. Why might the poem be titled "The Hill Wife" instead of being named after a particular person? What conclusions can you draw from this?

4. What is the old man like? Describe some of the things that he does, as well as what he can't do.

5. **Making Connections** Of which characters from *Ethan Frome* do the characters in these poems remind you? What are the similarities between the characters in the novella and in the poems?

Performing

Acting as a character in either poem, create a brief skit about a telephone call that the character either receives or makes. The call should discuss some aspect of rural life that was addressed or touched on in the poems. Although the audience can hear only the character's side, they should still be able to follow the entire conversation.

Sherwood
Anderson

Stolen Day

Before You Read

Focus Question

Recall a time when you used sickness as an excuse for not doing something.

Background

Writing between World War I and World War II, Sherwood Anderson drew on his own childhood to create believable stories about small town people. Many of these stories included are in his famous work of fiction *Winesburg, Ohio*.

Responding to the Reading

1. Whom does the narrator know who has inflammatory rheumatism, and what does that person do?

2. What does the narrator tell his mother when he arrives home, and what does he not tell her? What is her reaction?

3. What does the narrator mean when he says, "I was having a grand time, having died"? What real incident provided him with specific details?

4. How does the narrator get attention from his family towards the end of the story? Why does he tell them he has inflammatory rheumatism? How do they react to this news?

5. **Making Connections** Contrast the way this character's illness affects his family with the way Zeena's illness affected her family. What might be the reason for the difference?

Learning for Life

The narrator of this story does not quite know how to look and act sick. Help out other young students like him by writing rules of conduct for elementary-school-age children who want to look sick. Your rules should be humorous in tone and should close by implying that in the end, it is always better to go to school than to pretend to be sick.

from *The
Berkshire
Evening Eagle*

Fatal Coasting Accident

Before You Read

Focus Question

What real-life incident have you heard or read about that might make a good novel or film?

Background

This newspaper article from *The Berkshire Evening Eagle* of 12 March 1904, tells of the 1904 sledding accident that happened in Lenox, Massachusetts. Edith Wharton lived in Lenox at the time of the accident and knew one of the riders. This accident probably served as inspiration for the one in *Ethan Frome*.

Responding to the Reading

1. Who was steering the sled when the accident happened, and who kept claiming responsibility for it?

2. How might an accident like this have affected those who saw it or heard about it? Give your reasons.

3. The writer of this article says that the road “was never in finer condition” and “neither the post nor the sled was wrecked.” What is ironic about these two statements?

4. In your opinion, could this accident have been predicted and thus prevented, or not? Give reasons for your answer.

5. **Making Connections** What details about the accident are described in this newspaper account that were not described in *Ethan Frome*? What information about the accident is found in *Ethan Frome* but not in the newspaper account?

Creative Writing

Using your own imagination and the information from this article, write a report of the accident as if you had been eyewitness. Describe what you saw and heard and how you felt.

Naomi Shihab
Nye

Snow

Before You Read

Focus Question

What makes certain events memorable, while others fade?

Background

Palestinian American writer, editor, and poet Naomi Shihab Nye has lived in many places. She was born in St. Louis, Missouri, went to school in Jerusalem and Jordan and currently lives in San Antonio, Texas. The everyday people she has met in her different homes inspire her work.

Responding to the Reading

1. What is happening at home while the brother and sister are out sledding? Why is the sister's metaphor particularly appropriate?

2. How is the sled trip described in the poem different from other sled trips the speaker and his brother have taken? Why are they going sledding today, do you think?

3. How are the children's actions different from their feelings?

4. Is the snowstorm a symbol for something else, do you think? Give reasons for your answer, using evidence from the poem.

5. **Making Connections** In what ways is this poem similar to *Ethan Frome*? Consider the setting, the mood, and the way the characters behave.

Literature Groups

What is the change in the weather that the speaker mentions in the last line? In your group, discuss the meaning of these lines in relation to the rest of the poem. What does it suggest about the situation at home?

Sybil Marshall
Clementina
Black

A Farmer's Maid and The Dislike to Domestic Service

Before You Read

Focus Question

What kind of conditions do you think domestic workers face? Why might they perform this type of work?

Background

These first-hand accounts detail the work done by domestic servants at the turn of the last century. They offer a look at the type of work that Mattie Silver might have done.

Responding to the Reading

1. According to Marshall, what were the benefits of "good service"? Why might parents send a child to work in a "properly run big house"?

2. Describe some of the problems that domestic servants faced. What seemed to be the employers' attitudes towards these workers? Give reasons for your response.

3. How might the job of a domestic worker, such as a housecleaner or a nanny, be different today than it was during Marshall's and Black's time? What similarities still exist, do you think?

4. What conclusions can you draw about society's attitudes towards children and young teens at the turn of the century? In your opinion, what are some ways that those attitudes have changed?

5. **Making Connections** Which of the problems described in these accounts are similar to ones faced by Mattie Silver? Which ones are different?

Internet Connection

Use the Internet to learn more about present and past child labor practices in the United States. What sort of work is considered appropriate and proper for children? What sort of work is discouraged or condemned?

TEST: *Ethan Frome*

Recall and Interpret (40 points total; 4 points each)

A. Write the letter of the best answer.

- _____ 1. What event caused Ethan to quit his studies?
- a. Zeena's illness
 - b. his father's death
 - c. his mother's illness
 - d. a sledding accident
- _____ 2. What local landmark do Ethan and Mattie discuss on the walk home?
- a. the dangerous elm
 - b. the cemetery
 - c. his sawmill
 - d. the farmhouse
- _____ 3. What first attracted Ethan to Zeena?
- a. her hair
 - b. her laughter
 - c. her love of nature
 - d. her voice and speech
- _____ 4. What item got broken during Ethan and Mattie's dinner?
- a. a plate
 - b. a pickle-dish
 - c. a geranium pot
 - d. a lamp
- _____ 5. Which character knew the true cause of the accident?
- a. Zeena
 - b. Mrs. Varnum
 - c. Mrs. Hale
 - d. Denis Eady

B. Write a short answer for each question below.

6. Why does the narrator hear the story only bit by bit and finally have to put it together himself?
- _____
7. Why does Ethan propose to Zeena?
- _____
8. What is Mattie like when she first arrives in Starkfield?
- _____
9. Why does Ethan lie to Zeena, and what does he lie about?
- _____
10. What does Ethan do when Mattie gets on the sled in front of him, and why?
- _____

TEST: *Ethan Frome (continued)*

Evaluate and Connect (60 points total; 30 points each)

C. Answer two of the following essay questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Toward the end of the novel, as Ethan is considering his options, he has a realization:

The inexorable facts closed in on him like prison-wardens handcuffing a convict. There was no way out—none. He was a prisoner for life, and now his one ray of light was to be extinguished.

Identify at least three of the “facts” that kept Ethan a prisoner for life.

2. Describe the setting and tell what it contributes to the plot.
3. What does Ethan love about Mattie, and what does she love about him?
4. In what way is the final scene in Ethan’s kitchen an example of situational irony?
5. In writing about Wharton’s works in general, Edmund Wilson wrote

Her tragic heroines and heroes are the victims of the group pressure of convention; they are passionate or imaginative spirits, hungry for emotional and intellectual experience, who find themselves locked into a small closed system, and either destroy themselves by beating their heads against their prison or suffer a living death in resigning themselves to it.

Show how this statement applies to this novel, using examples from the book to support your main points.