

Ethan Frome Close Reading Questions

Directions: Answer the following questions in paragraph form, providing two pieces of text evidence (internally cite these please) and provide a Work Cited at the end. Do not use any ancillary sources; use only the novella itself to answer these questions.

Introduction and Chapter 1 Questions

1. What is the author's purpose for the introduction?
2. What can the narrator's point of view (POV) provide that is different from what Ethan Frome can?
3. What information can be gleaned about Ethan Frome thus far?
4. Select 5 words/phrases from the text that describe Ethan (cite these) and explain the significance of them.
5. Select 5 words/phrases from the text that describe Mattie (cite these) and explain the significance of them.
6. Why does Frome feel Denis Eady needs a horse-whipping?
7. What causes Zeena's "disfavor"? How does she address it?
8. Do the math. How old was Frome when he first met Mattie?

Chapters 2-3 Questions

9. Why did "Frome's heart...trembled back to safety" (Wharton)?
10. For what purpose does the author have Mattie attend dances in the story?
11. Passing the entrance gate to his property was a constant remind of what for Frome? What changes?
12. Contrast the tone words between the paragraph at the bottom of page 33 beginning "He let the vision..." to the following paragraph on page 34, "Zeena always went to bed...". What is different? Why?
13. What double meaning can be inferred from the two phrases said by Zeena then Frome at the end of Chapter 2. "You must have shook off that snow outside." "It *is* powerful cold down here."
14. Select 3-5 words/phrases that represent Ethan's tone on the first page of Chapter 3; identify the tone and explain how the words/phrases contribute to the tone.
15. Explain the circumstances as to how Mattie came to live with the Fromes.
16. Frome says in Chapter 3, "...that before night there would be rain...His dread was so strong that...he sought to postpone certainty." Besides the weather, to what else is Frome referring?

Chapters 4-5 Questions

17. On page 44, the paragraph that begins, “There the silence,” find the 5 words that represent Ethan’s growing situation. Explain how or why these words represent the situation.
18. Explain how Ethan came to marry Zeena. How long have they been wed?
19. Describe what can be gleaned about Zeena as a character thus far.
20. For what purpose do Ethan and Mattie discuss Zeena on their evening without her presence?
21. A big deal is made about the pickle dish. What is its significance?
22. What is the author’s purpose of the third paragraph of Chapter 5? How does the author develop this?
23. What is the role of the cat?
24. “Would you be scared to go down the Corbury Road with me on a night like this one?...That’s an ugly corner down by the big elm. If a fellow didn’t keep his eyes open he’d go plumb into it.” This quotation is an example of what literary device?

Chapters 6-8 Questions

25. Identify at least 2 purposes for why nothing is explicitly said between Ethan and Mattie about their “hopes”?
26. What has Zeena discovered about her “ailments”? How does she propose to solve her complications?
27. Examine the evidence thus far indicate Zeena has health issues and that she has ulterior motives?
28. “He no longer believed what Zeena had told him of the supposed seriousness of her state...” (Wharton). For what other purposes would Zeena be “sick”?
29. What causes Frome to feel “For a moment such a flame of hate rose in him that it ran down his arm and clenched his fist against her” (Wharton)?
30. “The cat did break the dish; but I got it down from the china-closet, and I’m the one to blame for its getting broken” (Wharton). How else can this statement be figuratively restated?
31. What “options” does Ethan consider given his circumstances? Why might they/might they not work? What is his conclusion?
32. What is the significance of the red scarf?
33. “Aunt Martha’s aint got a faded leaf on ‘em; but they pine away when they ain’t cared for,” says Zeena (Wharton). To what is Zeena really referring?
34. “He was planning to take advantage of the Hales’ sympathy to obtain money from them on false pretences” (Wharton). What does this say about Frome’s character? What is ironic about him?

Chapters 9-Epilogue Questions

35. At the bottom of page 81 to the top of page 82, the text says, “Now these and all other tokens of her presence had vanished, and the room looked as bare and comfortless as when Zeena had shown her it on the day of her arrival.” What tone does this passage send? How does this passage connect to ideas from throughout the text?
36. Chapter 9 describes “unreality” and “illusion”. Throughout the text and Chapter 9, what has been an illusion versus reality for Frome, Zeena, and Mattie?
37. “They had reached the crest of the Corbury Road, and between the indistinct white glimmer of the church and the black curtain of the Varnum spruces...” (88). In analyzing the imagery of this passage, what does “Corbury Road” represent? The “white glimmer of the church”? “The black curtain”?
38. “She seemed the embodied instrument of fate” (91). To whom is Frome referring? Infer what is meant by this?
39. “The thought of the animal’s suffering was intolerable to him and he struggled to raise himself, and could not because of a rock, or some huge mass, seemed to be lying on him” (92). Who is the animal? What is the rock? To what is this passage referring?
40. The epilogue brings the story back to the present with the narrator. In the second and third paragraphs the narrator describes two different women. To whom is he referring in paragraph 2? Paragraph 3? What is the irony of this situation?