



 Prestwick House

Activity Pack

ETHAN FROME

BY EDITH WHARTON



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Written by Nicole Guertin

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Historical Context

Objective: Understanding the historical and geographical context of the novel

Activity

Choose one of the following topics and research information about it in western Massachusetts (or the Berkshire Mountains) at the turn of the twentieth century (1900 – 1910). Use the Internet and your school or community libraries.

- Public Transportation
- Private (Individual) Transportation
- Education (primary, secondary, post-secondary)
- Housing (types of houses and their construction)
- Housekeeping (cooking and cleaning methods and tools)
- Blacksmithing
- Mill Working
- Farming
- Banking
- Common Medical Problems and their Remedies
- Doctors and Hospitals
- Shop Keeping
- Climate and Weather Patterns
- Social Activities and Entertainment

Present your research in the form of a tri-fold informational brochure for the Chamber of Commerce of the fictional town of Starkfield, Massachusetts, to distribute to visitors to the city in the early 1900s. Your pamphlet should be colorful and include pictures and text. Finally, list your sources on the back of the pamphlet.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Introduction

Setting and Symbolism

Objectives: Understanding how setting contributes to symbolism
 Understanding historical context

Activity

Research the style of farmhouse known as the “ell.” This was a popular design in New England at the time of the novel. Note that in the novel, it is called the “L.”

Sketch a bird’s eye view of what a typical New England farmhouse with an “ell” might have looked like during the early 1900s. Label the main house, “ell,” and barn or work building(s).

On page 8, the narrator sees Ethan Frome’s house for the first time. Using only the description that follows, sketch what you think a bird’s eye view of Ethan’s house might have looked like to the narrator. Label the buildings.

The house was bigger in my father’s time: I had to take down the “L,” a while back,’ Frome continued...I saw then that the unusually forlorn and stunted look of the house was partly due to the loss of what is known in New England as the “L”: that long deep-roofed adjunct usually built at right angles to the main house, and connecting it, by way of storerooms and tool-house, with the wood-shed and cow-barn.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters I – X**Main Ideas and Theme**

Objectives: Identifying main ideas and themes
 Summarizing content

Activity

Some authors use chapter titles to give an overview of a chapter's content or to point toward a significant incident or theme. Sometimes, a chapter title is taken directly from the dialogue or descriptions in the story. For example, chapter I of *Ethan Frome* could have been entitled "Mattie Silver" because she is the focus of the story in that chapter or "Zeena Takes Note" because Zeena makes repeated observations of Mattie and Ethan's relationship in the chapter.

As you read the novel, write a title for each chapter that focuses on its main idea or a theme. Be prepared to explain your choices.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters I – III**Imagery**

Objectives: Analyzing the effects of imagery on characterization and theme
Recognizing contrasts, similes, and metaphors

Activity

In the following chart, record each of the similes and metaphors you find associated with Mattie in Chapters I – III. An example has been done for you.

Record the references to heat or warmth associated with Mattie found on the following pages.

1. Page 12

2. Page 21

3. Page 24

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter VII

Characterization

Objectives: Analyzing character relationships
 Comparing character relationships

Activity

Most couples have their special song—one that was playing when they first met or during their first kiss or one that just reminds them of each other.

Based on the nature of their relationship and experiences together, what should Ethan and Zeena's song be? What about Ethan and Mattie's?

- Choose a song for each couple that you think sums up their relationship. If you need help getting started, think about the images that are associated with each couple in the book.
- Bring a copy of the lyrics to class. Be prepared to explain in detail why you think the song fits the couple.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter VII

Letter Writing and Point of View

Objectives: Understanding character motivation
 Writing from another character's point of view

Activity

The results of Zeena's visit to the "new doctor" in Bettsbridge are stunning for Ethan and Mattie. They both recognize Zeena's dissatisfaction with Mattie. They fear Zeena might suspect something of their feelings for each other, but they never expect her to act so drastically, decisively, and unilaterally as to dismiss Mattie without a warning and to have another girl on the way the very same day. Did Zeena suspect Ethan and Mattie's feelings for each other before going to Bettsbridge? Could Zeena have gone to find another hired girl?

Assume the persona of Zeena and imagine that you do suspect the nature of Ethan's and Mattie's relationship. Write a letter to your Aunt Martha Pierce to be sent ahead of you on the morning post the day you go to Bettsbridge. In the letter, tell her of your imminent arrival, explain your suspicions, and prepare her to help you find a solution to your problem. Cite at least four specific pieces of evidence from chapters 1-3 that make you think Ethan and Mattie have inappropriate feelings for each other.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters VIII – IX**Setting and Symbolism**

Objective: Analyzing how the setting reflects the characters' actions and emotions

Activity

In the beginning of the novel, nature is described in hostile terms and appears indifferent to Ethan's plight throughout the story. In the closing chapters, however, Wharton has nature show some signs of empathizing with Ethan and Mattie's tragedy. Fill in the following chart to analyze the significance of the rich descriptive detail.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter X

Symbolism and Foreshadowing

Objectives: Recognizing symbols
 Understanding how symbolism contributes to foreshadowing

Activity

Edith Wharton uses several repeated images in the novel. Fill in the following chart by reading the passages in which each image is found and suggesting what the image could represent. Finally, consider what each symbol could foreshadow in the story.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Wrap-Up**Irony**

Objectives: Recognizing irony
 Using irony

Activity

Explain how each of the events or ideas below becomes ironic by the end of the novel. Fill out the chart on the following page. The first one has been done for you.