

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

Silas Marner

by George Eliot

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Chapter 1

1. George Eliot used this epigraph from Wordsworth to begin her book: “a child, more than all other gifts/ That earth can offer to declining man,/ Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts.” This quotation states that a child is the greatest gift that can be given to a person who has very little. A person who cares for a child is able to think about the future and have hope. Do you associate the idea of a new child with a gift or with hope? Why or why not? If you remember when one of your younger siblings was born, what emotions did you feel about that?
2. The narrator talks about toy spinning wheels enjoyed by women too wealthy to have to do their own sewing and weaving. Do you have toys or play games in which you pretend to be someone from a different social class? Many video games involve the role of criminals and villains; if you play those sorts of games, what feelings do you associate with them?
3. The author suggests that there are people who never expect happiness of joy in life. Instead, they consider pain, hard work, or misfortune their expected lot in life. Do you know anyone like this? Describe this person and what it is like to be around him or her.
4. In your own words, contrast the personalities and ethics of William Dane and Silas Marner. Which are you more like? Explain.

Response Journal

5. In this chapter, Silas is found guilty by the casting of lots—a process similar to throwing dice, but with the idea that God is controlling the outcome to show the truth in an unclear situation. How is the justice process different now? Why do you think that the American justice system does not use such a system as casting lots?

Chapter 2

6. When Silas moves to Raveloe, he sets himself up in business as a weaver, and this work becomes a type of therapy. When he is at his work as a weaver, he is described as a spider working from impulse, without thinking about the task in front of him. It is a way for him to block out the emptiness and unhappiness of his life. What sorts of things do you do to get negative feelings and memories out of your mind? What things work better than others? Write about one of the times when it was the most difficult to get negative feelings and memories out of your mind.
7. As Silas starts his career in Raveloe, the money he accumulates comes to symbolize the positive value of material goods. How can wealth be as a sign of goodness?
8. Silas' devotion to his work and to his money begins to affect his physical appearance. His face and body seem to shrink and bend until he begins to resemble the mechanical objects of his trade—like a handle or a crooked tube used in weaving. Do you know a person whose physical appearance reflects his or her personality or a person whose physical appearance reflects an occupation? Give a physical description of the person as well as details of the personality or occupation.

Silas Marner

9. When he is at the height of his attachment to material things, Silas breaks his brown cooking-pot. Sad at heart, he picks up the pieces and takes them to his house. In fact, he glues the pot back together and puts it in a place of memory in his hut. What would you prize and fix if it broke? Explain why.
10. The picture of Silas sitting and running his hands through and around his money is both enticing and sickening to most readers. If you knew Silas at this time, what might you say to him? Complete this dialogue.

You: Silas, what you are doing with that money is...

Chapter 3

11. Squire Cass raises his two sons in “idleness”; in other words, his sons are not expected to do any sort of work to earn their large allowances. What advantages and disadvantages do you think there might be to growing up without ever having to work?
12. Godfrey is described as a large, muscular man with great courage in the face of physical danger. However, his strength and courage are of little use to him when he is faced with an ethical or moral dilemma. Think about an emotional or ethical decision that you had to make that seemed too difficult to make at the time. What decision did you make? Do you think it was the right one? Why or why not?

Response Journal

13. Godfrey has a clearly unpleasant problem: he must decide whether to make his secret marriage public. He chooses, at least for the time being, to leave it a secret while pursuing Nancy Lammeter. Can you think of a time when you lied and then decided to stick with that lie for a long time? Describe some emotions you went through while the lie remained secret.
14. Godfrey's rakish brother Dunstan says about himself that any time he falls he always lands on his legs. What common superstitions do you believe in? Make a list of some of them.

Chapter 4

15. When Dunstan goes to meet Keating and Bryce, with the intention of selling Wildfire, he starts by talking as though he would never part with the horse; this is interpreted as the beginning of a bargain. Think of a time when you were trying to ask something difficult, so you started by talking about something completely different. Did your plan work? Describe what happened.
16. After his accident on Wildfire, Dunstan walks up to Silas' hut. He justifies his entry by saying that the weaver must be dead, since he has left his hut standing open in this way. In fact, he now thinks only about where the money is, justifying his actions by telling himself that Silas is dead. Have you ever justified doing something wrong by assuming things that turned out not to be true? Did you get away with it? How did the process make you feel?

Chapter 5

17. Silas' first response to the theft of his gold is terror. Compose a short poem, which may or may not rhyme, about gold. Try to make the poem more than six lines long.
18. Silas first enters Raveloe society when he reports the theft of his gold in the Rainbow, a tavern where wealthy men might enjoy the good company of men of lower social rank but still feel superior to them. Write a letter to someone you feel acts in a superior manner toward you and explain how this treatment makes you feel.

Chapter 6

19. Mr. Macey claims that people are so smart they can come up with fifty reasons for something, but they never see the real reason right in front of them. Explain to a friend who can't figure out what is meant just what Eliot meant by that comment.