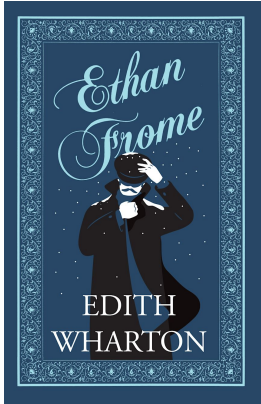


AP English Language and Composition
Summer Reading Assignment



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Directions: During the summer break, you are to read *Ethan Frome* by Edith Wharton. Please note: **you do not need to submit these questions;** they are merely guiding you through each set of chapters. Upon our return to school, we will have several writing assignments pertaining to this novel, along with an assessment.

Prologue

1. Wharton opens with a narrator who is an outsider piecing together a story he didn't witness. Why might she have made this structural choice rather than telling the story directly? What effect does it create before the reader even meets Ethan?
2. The narrator describes Ethan as "the most striking figure in Starkfield" despite, or because of, his physical ruin. How does Wharton's word choice in her physical description of Ethan establish tone and foreshadow the novel's themes?
3. Starkfield is described as a place that wears people down over time. How does Wharton use the setting in the prologue as more than just backdrop? What is it doing thematically?
4. The prologue is written from a different time than the main story. How does telling the reader upfront that something went wrong change the way you read everything that follows?

Chapter 1

1. Wharton describes the Frome farmhouse as having once had an "L," an extension that was removed, leaving the house diminished and exposed. Why might Wharton have included this architectural detail? What does it suggest about Ethan?
2. Ethan is largely silent throughout this chapter. How does Wharton use silence as a characterization tool? What does his inability or unwillingness to speak tell us about him?
3. The landscape of Starkfield in winter is rendered in specific, deliberate detail. Choose one descriptive passage and analyze how Wharton uses imagery to connect the physical environment to Ethan's interior life.
4. We learn early that Ethan had ambitions. He studied engineering and wanted to leave Starkfield. How does Wharton use this backstory detail to complicate our understanding of his situation? Is he a victim of circumstance or of his own choices?
5. How does Wharton establish a sense of entrapment in this chapter, and through what specific techniques does she do it?

Chapter 2

1. Ethan watches Mattie dancing before approaching her. Analyze how Wharton constructs this scene. What specific details does she choose, and what do they reveal about Ethan's feelings without stating them directly?

2. Denis Eady pursues Mattie in this chapter. What purpose does his character serve? How does his presence function as a foil or as a source of tension for Ethan?
3. The walk home through the winter night is rendered almost lyrically. How does Wharton's prose style shift in this chapter compared to the prologue, and what does that shift accomplish?
4. Ethan imagines scenarios and conversations that never actually happen. What does this habit of fantasy reveal about his character, and what argument might Wharton be making through it?
5. How does Wharton contrast Mattie and Zeena in this chapter without having Zeena appear directly? What techniques does she use to make the contrast felt?

Chapter 3

1. The cat appears prominently in this chapter, repeatedly taking Zeena's chair and disturbing the domestic scene. How does Wharton use the cat as a symbol, and what does it represent in the context of this household?
2. Zeena waits up for Ethan and Mattie despite being ill. How does Wharton construct Zeena's entrance, through word choice, positioning, and detail, to make her feel threatening without making her overtly villainous?
3. The domestic space of the Frome kitchen is described carefully. How does Wharton use the physical details of the house to reflect the emotional dynamics between the characters?
4. Ethan struggles to speak honestly throughout this chapter. Analyze a specific moment where he fails to say what he means. What does Wharton suggest through that failure?
5. Zeena is often read as a purely oppressive figure, but what details in this chapter complicate that reading? Does Wharton give her any sympathetic dimension here?

Chapter 4

1. When Zeena announces she is leaving for Bettsbridge, Ethan's mood shifts dramatically. How does Wharton render that shift, through action, thought, or imagery, and what does the shift reveal about him?
2. Ethan attempts to ask his creditor for more money and fails. How does this scene function in the novel's larger argument about Ethan's entrapment? Is his poverty circumstantial or is something else at work?
3. Wharton gives Ethan moments of genuine tenderness toward the farm and the land. How does his relationship to the physical landscape function in this chapter? Is it a source of comfort, identity, or further entrapment?
4. The chapter builds toward an evening alone with Mattie. How does Wharton create anticipation and tension through pacing and detail in the second half of the chapter?

Chapter 5

1. This is the emotional center of the novel, the one evening Ethan and Mattie spend alone. How does Wharton maintain tension throughout a chapter in which almost nothing externally happens?
2. The pickle dish breaks during this chapter. Analyze the moment of breaking carefully. How does Wharton frame it, and why is it significant that it is Zeena's most prized possession, kept unused?
3. Wharton uses the cat again in this chapter. Track its appearances. What is it doing narratively and symbolically each time it appears?
4. The near intimacy between Ethan and Mattie is never consummated. They almost touch, almost speak honestly, almost act. Why might Wharton have made this choice structurally? What does the almost accomplish that an actual kiss would not?

5. Analyze Wharton's prose style in this chapter, considering sentence length, imagery, and rhythm. How does her style mirror the emotional state of the scene?
6. By the end of the chapter everything is superficially restored. The dish is hidden, the cat is settled. What is Wharton suggesting through that surface restoration?

Chapter 6

1. Zeena's return is rendered through Ethan's perception. How does Wharton use free indirect discourse, filtering events through Ethan's consciousness, to shape the reader's response to Zeena?
2. Zeena announces that a new hired girl is coming and Mattie must leave. How does Wharton construct this scene so that Zeena's cruelty feels both deliberate and possibly justified?
3. Ethan's rage in this chapter is largely internal. How does Wharton use the gap between what Ethan thinks and what he says to make an argument about his character?
4. Consider Zeena's illness, which has never been clearly diagnosed. How does Wharton use ambiguity around her condition to complicate the reader's judgment of her?
5. This chapter marks a clear turning point. How does Wharton signal that shift through changes in tone, imagery, or sentence structure?

Chapter 7

1. The confrontation between Ethan and Zeena over Mattie escalates to its most direct point in this chapter. How does Wharton manage the power dynamics between them? Who holds power, and how is that communicated through dialogue and physical positioning?
2. The broken pickle dish is discovered. Analyze this moment carefully. How does Wharton use pacing and detail to make the reveal land as heavily as it does?
3. Zeena's grief over the dish is genuine. How does this moment humanize her, and what does it complicate about the reader's sympathy?
4. Ethan briefly imagines a life with Mattie away from Starkfield. How does Wharton render that fantasy, and how does she undercut it?
5. By the end of the chapter Ethan has not acted and seemingly cannot act. What argument is Wharton making through his repeated paralysis?

Chapter 8

1. Ethan begins writing a letter to Zeena explaining that he is leaving and then stops. Why does he stop? How does Wharton use this unfinished letter as a window into his character?
2. Ethan visits Mrs. Hale hoping to borrow money and cannot bring himself to ask. What does this scene reveal, and what does Wharton seem to be arguing about the relationship between pride, community, and entrapment?
3. Wharton gives Ethan a moment of clarity in this chapter where he sees his situation plainly. How does she render that moment, and what makes it devastating rather than liberating?
4. The chapter is short and the prose feels compressed. How does Wharton use structure and pacing here to mirror Ethan's psychological state?
5. At what point in this chapter does the reader understand that Ethan will not escape? How does Wharton lead you to that conclusion without stating it directly?

Chapter 9

1. The sled ride is the novel's climax. How does Wharton build tension in this chapter through pacing, imagery, and the physical details of the descent?
2. The decision to steer into the elm tree is made quickly and with minimal internal deliberation. Why might Wharton have written it this way rather than giving Ethan a longer moment of conscious choice?
3. The elm tree has appeared earlier in the novel. Track its earlier appearances. What has it represented, and how does that earlier symbolism deepen the meaning of the crash?
4. Wharton withholds the aftermath of the crash entirely, cutting away at the moment of impact. What is the effect of that narrative choice?
5. This chapter is written with unusual momentum and compression compared to the rest of the novel. How does Wharton's prose style shift here, and why?
6. Is the sled ride an act of love, cowardice, despair, or something else entirely? What evidence in the chapter supports your reading?

Epilogue

1. The epilogue returns us to the narrator's frame. How does Wharton use the return to the present tense to reframe everything the reader has just experienced?
2. The image of the three figures living together, Ethan, Mattie, and Zeena, is the novel's final irony. How does Wharton construct this image, and what argument does it make about fate, duty, and consequence?
3. Mrs. Hale's final commentary gives the reader the key to interpreting the ending. How does Wharton use her as a narrative device, and why might she have chosen this character to deliver the novel's closing insight rather than the narrator?
4. Mattie, who represented warmth and possibility throughout the novel, is now described as bitter and sharp tongued. What is Wharton arguing through this transformation?
5. The epilogue suggests that the real tragedy is not the crash but what came after it. Do you agree? How does Wharton use the epilogue to redefine what the novel's central tragedy actually is?
6. Wharton ends without resolution or moral commentary. What is the effect of that restraint, and what does it suggest about her argument regarding fate versus choice?