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Silas Marner
George Eliot



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Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

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.

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?

Chapter 7

20. On his way to the Rainbow, Silas assumed in his mind that Jem Rodney is the one who stole his money. Put yourself in Jem's place; when Silas bursts into the tavern and accuses you, write out your answer to Silas.

21. What do you think it means when the author says that Silas heads out into the night as one who plans to "watch the morning"?

Chapter 8

22. The chief suspect in the disappearance of Silas' money quickly becomes a traveling peddler who, even more quickly, develops a detailed personal description based simply on rumor. Write a short letter to the mayor of Raveloe expressing your opinions.

23. Godfrey is anxious for Dunstan to return, yet at the same time, he dreads the sight of his brother. Describe a time when you had conflicting and opposite emotions about an incident.

24. Squire Cass seems to be a hard man to deal with; we learn that he tends to be neglectful and overlook or ignore evil until he cannot avoid it any longer. Then he becomes harsh, severe, and tyrannical. What kind of father do you think Squire Cass would be?

Chapter 12

37. At the beginning of this chapter, there are some signs that Molly is addicted to opium. Look up opium in an encyclopedia or on the Internet. Write a paragraph containing some statistics about this dangerous drug.
38. Once Silas realizes that the “gold” is the golden hair of a child, rather than the golden glow of coins, he starts to think that the child is a message from his far-off life in Lantern Yard. Explain to a classmate how this type misunderstanding could occur.
39. The arrival of the child also stirs Silas’ old sense of faith that has not been felt since he came to Raveloe. He begins to feel again a sense of some divine authority overseeing his life. How much of our lives, do you think, is under our own control? How much of the rest is controlled by Chance or by divine authority? Explain your opinion and back it up.

Chapter 13

40. Godfrey casually suggests that Silas take Molly’s child to the parish orphanage. What is your opinion about the role of an orphanage in today’s society?