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Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Silas Marner

by George Eliot

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Note: All references come from the Prestwick House Literary Classics edition of *Silas Marner*, copyright 2006.

Silas Marner

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. trace the spiritual life of Silas Marner from his loss of faith in and estrangement from mankind to his eventual return.
2. discuss this critic's point about George Eliot's novel and provide examples that might support or refute the following statement by referring to *Silas Marner*: Having lost her Christian faith, Eliot would replace it with a philosophy that kindness, honesty, and courage were necessary for human survival.
3. point out the paramount role that organized religion plays in this novel's commentary on the practices of both the sect and, later, the traditional church that Silas attends.
4. write a short character analysis of the following characters:
 - Godfrey Cass
 - Dolly Winthrop
 - Nancy Lammeter Cass
 - Dunstan Cass
 - The Squire
5. discuss the extent to which the picture drawn of country life of the period seems realistic, pointing out examples that support or refute that position.
6. point out how Godfrey Cass' life depicts the theme of the story: Failure to act in a moral fashion when it is required can later be a cause of great regret.
7. point out and comment on Eliot's use of insect and flower imagery as well as her symbolic use of light and dark.
8. discuss how these various characters believe that the course of one's life is determined by luck/fate or by divine providence.
 - Dunstan Cass
 - Godfrey Cass
 - Dolly Winthrop
 - Silas Marner

1. The story, published in 1861, relates events taking place in some earlier time. In what time period would you place the action of this story?

2. What people are described as “alien-looking men,” and why are they thus described?

3. Why are the weaver and visiting peddlers thought to be possibly in league with the Evil One, the devil?

4. As the story opens, how long has Silas Marner been in the town of Raveloe, where has he come from, and how is he viewed by the inhabitants of the town?

5. In addition to his reclusive nature and occupation, why else is it thought that he may be aligned with the devil?

Chapter 4

VOCABULARY

cajoling – coaxing, convincing
coppice – a group of small trees or shrubs
divined – knew, discerned, figured out
felicitous – well-timed; agreeable
jacks – devices used to turn the spit over a fire
loom – a device used to make thread or yarn into cloth
surplus – extra, left-over
treadles – pedals
unprecedented – different, unheard of

1. As Dunstan rides to the hunt, he passes Silas’s cottage. The idea comes to him that Godfrey might borrow the money from Silas and, thereby, not have to sell the horse. Why does he reject this idea?

2. Three times in this chapter, Dunstan refers to himself as “a lucky fellow.” After the accident with the horse, why does he still think of himself as lucky? What does this say about him?

3. Although Bryce offers 120 pounds for the horse, why does the sale never go through?

Chapter 12

VOCABULARY

conjectures – conclusions, guesses, assumptions
degradation – shame
futurity – future events or possibilities
indolence – laziness
presiding – ruling
self-reproving – self-disgust, acknowledging one's guilt
torpor – unconsciousness
vindictiveness – desire for revenge

1. Why has Molly chosen this night to come and confront Godfrey?

2. Molly blames Godfrey for her wretched condition, but what is Molly's real problem?

3. How does the young child end up sitting in Silas' house in front of the fire?

4. What is Silas' reaction when he sees the blonde hair of the child?
