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CLASSICS

**Simon & Schuster Classroom Activities  
for the Enriched Classic edition of  
*Ethan Frome* by Edith Wharton  
0-7434-8770-2 • \$4.95 / \$6.95 Can.**

Activities created by Katie Gideon

Each of the three activities includes:

- NCTE standards covered
- An estimate of the time needed
- A complete list of materials needed
- Step-by-step instructions
- Questions to help you evaluate the results

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Lesson Plan #1

**“Literature and Society”**  
(A Lesson in Theme)

The novel *Ethan Frome* tells a story at once both tragically personal and deeply emblematic, in which the main characters’ struggles mirror the difficulties faced by a nation at large. Through her deft thematic manipulation, Edith Wharton provides readers with a compelling commentary on social and economic issues.

In this lesson, students will read the novel’s introduction to better understand its historical context. Through guided reading and research, students will describe and discuss prominent issues of the Progressive Era. Finally, they will explore how these issues inform the novel’s recurring themes.

This activity begins with one homework assignment, followed by one fifty-minute class period.

**NCTE Standards Covered:**

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

**What To Do:**

1. Give each student a copy of Handout #1. Instruct the students to do the following for homework:
  - a. Read the publisher’s introduction (pages vii-xvi), as well as the chronology and historical context.

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- b. Define each of the words listed on Handout #1 (each word appears somewhere in the selected reading) and write a sentence using each word. Then, use personal experience as well as the reading to answer the handout's remaining questions.
- c. Choose one of the events from the historical context timeline and conduct some brief research. Write one paragraph on the back of Handout #1 summarizing your findings. You should be able to tell your classmates why this event is historically important and how it may have influenced Wharton's writing.

2. The next day in class, discuss the students' research. How is the Progressive Era similar to today's society? How is it different? How will this knowledge affect their reading of the novel?

3. Divide students into pairs. Explain that each pair will examine a major recurring theme from *Ethan Frome*. Then, hand each pair a strip of paper bearing one of the following thematic phrases: poverty stifles hope, conformity stifles people, society stifles women.

4. Instruct the pairs to represent their theme by making a collage that depicts their theme—as evident in Wharton's society, our society, or both.

5. Post the finished collages. Allow enough time for students to walk around, viewing and processing one another's work. For homework, have them respond to the three themes in a journal write (e.g., "What do you feel is most oppressive to an ambitious young person—poverty, cultural discrimination, or pressure to conform? Explain.")

**What You Need:**

A copy of the Enriched Classic edition of *Ethan Frome* (ISBN: 0743487702) for each student

Copies of Handout #1

Three themes (poverty stifles hope, conformity stifles people, society stifles women) copied onto small strips of paper (one theme for each pair of students)

Collage materials (magazines, colored paper, glue, scissors, etc.)

**How Did It Go?**

Reading the introduction is a great way to introduce theme to students unfamiliar with literary analysis. Furthermore, the visually based collage activity renders theme accessible for students developing English language proficiency.

Do the students better understand the relationship between Wharton's society and her literary focus? Could they comprehend the common themes running through *Ethan Frome*? Do students have some basis of understanding for the close reading and analysis activities that follow?

**“Isolation: An Investigation”**  
(A Lesson in Close Reading)

This close reading activity continues the previous investigation of Wharton’s commentary on social and economic issues. In this lesson, students will begin to analyze exactly how the author conveys and employs her various themes. They will identify and interpret passages relating to isolation and conformity.

This activity will initially take one fifty-minute class period (plus one potential homework assignment). The analysis may then be continued as later chapters require close-reading—students can follow one major theme throughout the course of the story, or divide their attention between several.

**NCTE Standards Covered:**

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

**What To Do:**

1. Lead students in a brief discussion on isolation and conformity. Have them define each term and explain how they see isolation and conformity functioning in their high school. Then, relate their observations to the isolation and conformity experienced by citizens of rural Massachusetts. Using students’ prior historical knowledge, explore the publisher’s first two questions for discussion (page 179).
2. Assign the prologue for reading. Pass out Handout #2. Explain that students will focus their reading on analysis of passages concerning isolation and conformity.
3. To demonstrate this method of analysis, read aloud the opening passage of the story (page 9 to first paragraph on page 11). Discuss how the example passage demonstrates the theme of isolation. Make sure students understand how to use their literary analysis bookmark columns.

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4. Students will read the whole prologue silently, pausing to cut out their bookmarks as scissors become available. Students can place bookmarks as they identify potentially appropriate passages, but should keep reading to maintain a sense of fluency. After finishing the prologue, they can go back and fill their bookmarks with interpretation.

5. Depending on students' reading abilities, they may or may not finish in class. If the majority of your students will be taking the assignment home, stop their work a few minutes before class ends. Have one or two students share potential passages that they've already identified, answer any questions, and then remind students that they must finish this assignment before tomorrow's class.

### **What You Need:**

A copy of the Enriched Classic edition of *Ethan Frome* (ISBN: 0743487702) for each student

Class copies of Handout #2

scissors

### **How Did It Go?**

Did the students properly cite passages in the text? Were they able to identify passages that illustrate the theme of isolation and conformity? Did they correctly interpret their selected passages? Do the students' questions and observations indicate an understanding of the story thus far?

Lesson Plan #3

**“Defend, Challenge, or Qualify”**  
(A Lesson in Rhetorical Response)

Rich in literary elements and thematic repetition, *Ethan Frome* offers an excellent opportunity to develop students’ rhetorical analysis skills.

The following assessment activity is designed to develop students’ confidence and effectiveness as they write under pressure. In this lesson, students will use close-reading, critical thinking, and pre-writing skills to discuss major themes from Edith Wharton’s novel. They begin with a practice prompt on poverty; the activity culminates with a timed write on gender inequality.

This activity takes two fifty-minute class periods to complete (plus one homework assignment).

**NCTE Standards Covered:**

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

**What To Do:**

1. Lead a brief discussion regarding some of the high-stakes tests that students will encounter in compliance with state standards and/or as preparation for college admissions. Explain that the ability to write well under pressure is a skill valued in both the academic and business community, and that it’s your obligation as an educator to help them acquire and hone this skill. To that end, tomorrow’s class will involve a timed writing exam.
2. Pass out copies of Handout #3. Explain that successful writers carefully read all of the information provided in a prompt. Encourage students to underline key words and phrases as you read the poverty essay prompt out loud. Pause to clarify any unfamiliar vocabulary.
3. Then, lead students through the prompt analysis. The whole class can work together on identifying “task” and “information.” Have individual students formulate a position, and then call on several volunteers to share. Students can vote on the position they’d like to use as a class.

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4. In small groups, students should brainstorm potential passages to use as supporting evidence. A representative from each group can report on one or two of their best pieces of evidence. Invite students to ask each other clarifying questions.
5. Select the three strongest or most interesting pieces of textual evidence. Use it as you guide your students through the creation of an essay outline. Students should be taking notes throughout the process, and should have a completed essay preparation sheet at this point.
6. Direct students' attention to the gender inequality essay prompt. This is the prompt that will be used during tomorrow's timed write. Read the prompt aloud and ask if there are any questions concerning vocabulary.
7. Clarify that students must now work individually in order to preserve academic integrity. They may use the rest of the class period to start on their homework, which is to complete an essay preparation sheet for the test prompt.
8. The next day of class, proctor the exam. If this is the first time your students are completing a timed essay write, you may wish to spend five minutes at the beginning of class answering questions and alleviating anxiety. (Note: if you would like to give students more practice before administering the timed write, you can also spend another class period on preparation. They can use the poverty essay preparation to complete a practice essay.)

**What You Need:**

A copy of the Enriched Classic edition of *Ethan Frome* (ISBN: 0743487702) for each student

Class copies of Handout #3

Notebook paper for essay test

**How Did It Go?**

Did students learn something about Edith Wharton's social message? Were students able to identify themes within the text? Did they make connections between different passages? Could they use rhetorical analysis to formulate and support a coherent argument? Could they synthesize what they learned into an organized essay? Did their essays fully address the prompt?

Handout #1

**Key Concepts: *Ethan Frome***

For this section, define and write a sample sentence for each word in the space provided.

Advocacy \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Circumscribed \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Convention \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Patriarchal \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Use information from the introduction (pages vii-xvi) as well as evidence from your own experience to answer the following questions.

1. In your own words, explain some of the issues that caused public outrage during the Progressive Movement.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you think the Progressive Moment solved the nation’s problems permanently, or do Americans still face many of the same issues today? Please explain your reasoning.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. True or False? “Poverty renders people hopeless; they become incapable of changing their circumstances.” Explain your position regarding this statement.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



Handout #2

“Isolation: An Investigation”

Cut out the close reading bookmarks. As you read the prologue, look for other passages that demonstrate the theme of **isolation and conformity**. Use the example for a guide as you annotate and interpret three other passages.

EXAMPLE

Passage	Interpretation	Questions/Observations
“He seldom received anything but a copy of the Bettsbridge Eagle... and would then turn away with a silent nod to the post-master.” (pages 10-11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ lack of mail = Ethan doesn't have friends or interests outside Starkfield.</li> <li>▪ patent medicine mail = Zeena constantly sick?</li> <li>▪ silent nod to postman = doesn't talk with locals?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Why does he drive in for such boring mail?</li> <li>▪ I wonder if Ethan gets along with Zeena.</li> <li>▪ Phrase “without a glance” twice in one paragraph.</li> <li>▪ Ethan has a lonely life.</li> </ul>

Passage	Interpretation	Questions/Observations

Passage	Interpretation	Questions/Observations

Passage	Interpretation	Questions/Observations

Handout #3

**“Defend, Challenge, or Qualify”**

Henry Ford, founder of the Ford Motor Company, once said, “If money is your hope for independence you will never have it. The only real security that a man will have in this world is a reserve of knowledge, experience, and ability.”

Consider this quote in relation to the characters in Edith Wharton’s *Ethan Frome*. Then, using evidence from the novel, write an essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies Ford’s assertions concerning money and independence.

TIP Prompt Analysis	Textual Evidence
<p><b>T (Task):</b> What is this prompt asking me to do?</p> <p><b>I (Information):</b> What <u>specific</u> information should I analyze?</p> <p><b>P (Position):</b> What is my stance on the topic?</p>	<p>What supporting details can I use to strengthen my position?</p>

Thesis Statement (your polished **position**): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

First Textual Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

How it supports my thesis: \_\_\_\_\_

Second Textual Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

How it supports my thesis: \_\_\_\_\_

Third Textual Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

How it supports my thesis: \_\_\_\_\_

Conclusion (points to reiterate): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(-continued-)

**“Defend, Challenge, or Qualify”**

*For homework, complete the following prompt analysis, textual evidence, and outline organizer. During tomorrow’s timed essay write, you will be able to use this single page for notes. You will NOT be able to use your book. Be sure to plan accordingly.*

In her exploration of problems caused by female inequality, American feminist Betty Friedan wrote, “Men are not the enemy, but the fellow victims. The real enemy is women’s denigration of themselves.”

Consider this quote in relation to the characters in Edith Wharton’s *Ethan Frome*. Who is the victim? Who is the enemy? Using your character analysis, write an essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies Friedan’s assertions concerning the relationship between victims and enemies of gender inequality.

TIP Prompt Analysis	Textual Evidence
<p><b>T (Task):</b> What is this prompt asking me to do?</p> <p><b>I (Information):</b> What <u>specific</u> information should I analyze?</p> <p><b>P (Position):</b> What is my stance on the topic?</p>	<p>What supporting details can I use to strengthen my position?</p>

Thesis Statement (your polished **position**): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

First Textual Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

How it supports my thesis: \_\_\_\_\_

Second Textual Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

How it supports my thesis: \_\_\_\_\_

Third Textual Evidence: \_\_\_\_\_

How it supports my thesis: \_\_\_\_\_

Conclusion (points to reiterate): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_