

Silas Marner
by
George Eliot**Book Information**

George Eliot, Silas Marner

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Book Level: 9.7

Interest Level: UG

A bitter man living alone with his hoard of gold learns about the power of love when his riches are stolen and a beautiful child is left on his doorstep.

Topics: Community Life, Ethics/Morality; Community Life, Money; Countries/Regions, England; Emotions, Love; People, Children; Popular Groupings, College Bound; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 9-12

Main Characters

Aaron Winthrop the man Eppie marries

Dolly Winthrop mother of Aaron and friend to Silas after he takes Eppie as his daughter

Dunstan (Dunsey) Cass brother to Godfrey, who steals the gold and silver hoarded by Silas

Eppie the young orphan girl Silas raises

Godfrey Cass Eppie's biological father

Molly Farren Godfrey's first wife, Eppie's mother, and an opium addict

Mr. Macey a tailor and the parish-clerk

Mr. Tookey the deputy-clerk who replaces Mr. Macey as parish-clerk

Mrs. Osgood Nancy's aunt

Nancy Lammeter woman who becomes Godfrey's wife after his secret first wife dies

Sally Oates a woman who found relief from her disease after taking some of Silas's "stuff"

Sarah the woman to whom Silas was engaged at Lantern Yard

Silas Marner the weaver who loses his hoard of gold and finds treasure in an orphan girl

Squire Cass father of Dunsey and Godfrey and Raveloe's most prominent landowner

William Dane friend of Silas in Lantern Yard who seemingly sets up Silas to be wrongly accused

Vocabulary

cataplexy a sudden loss of motion and sensation, in which the person is speechless, senseless, and fixed in one posture with his eyes wide open, without seeing or understanding

culpable guilty

distrain to seize and hold as security for a debt

phantasm mental image

pillion a light, well-cushioned saddle for women

Synopsis

Silas Marner moves from Lantern Yard to Raveloe after having been wrongly accused of stealing a bag of money. In Raveloe, he devotes his time to his craft as a weaver. He has little contact with the people of Raveloe, choosing to work many hours at his craft to earn golden coins. The gold he hoards becomes his focus and companion in life.

Quite by accident Dunsey Cass, the Squire's son, discovers the cottage unattended and steals Silas's precious golden and silver coins. Although a search is made for the robber, the identity of the thief remains a mystery.

Seemingly in replacement for Silas's stolen gold, a golden-haired girl wanders into his cottage. Discovering that she is an orphan, Silas names her for his dead sister, Eppie, and raises her as his own daughter.

The biological father, Godfrey Cass, stands by in silence when the child is discovered. He fears that Nancy, the woman he hopes to marry, will reject him if she hears of his previous marriage and his child.

The action skips to sixteen years later. Silas has done right by the girl and taken her to church. In caring for the girl, he has developed new relationships with the people of Raveloe. His life now centers around his relationship with his daughter.

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

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Meanwhile, Godfrey and Nancy have married, but they have no children. Godfrey has suggested adopting Eppie to Nancy several times only to be refused. When Dunsey's skeleton is found and the truth of the robbery comes to light, Godfrey tells Nancy the truth about Eppie.

Nancy and Godfrey go to Silas to offer to look after Eppie, giving her the things he is not able to give her. When Silas refuses the offer, Godfrey tells of his true relationship to Eppie. He proposes that Eppie live with them in their house. Silas leaves the decision to Eppie. Eppie chooses to stay with the only father she has known and the way of life in which she was reared.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

How do we know that Silas felt a need to prove his innocence in relation to the incident at Lantern Yard?

He talked to Dolly Winthrop about the incident at Lantern Yard. Later, he traveled to Lantern Yard and tried to discover if he had been vindicated of his alleged crime.

Literary Analysis

Why wasn't Dunsey ever suspected of stealing Silas's money at the time of the crime?

Dunsey was the son of the Squire and, therefore, an unlikely candidate for such an act. Pedlars were regarded suspiciously because of their transience, and they were good scapegoats for whatever crimes were committed.

Inferential Comprehension

Why did Silas let Eppie decide whether she would live with Godfrey and Nancy?

He loved her and wanted the best for her. Although it would have hurt him greatly if she had left him, he understood that this was a decision he could not make for her.

Constructing Meaning

Predict how Godfrey and Nancy will treat Eppie and Silas in the future.

As with the wedding, they will probably give Eppie special things from time to time if she will take them. Most likely, they will make sure Eppie and Silas always have the basics. Godfrey knows it is too late to mend his neglect of Eppie and seems intent on mending his subtler neglect of his wife instead.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Literary Features A theme of the story deals with blessings being given to another when someone refuses that blessing. Because he fears that Nancy will not marry him if she knows about his wife and child, Godfrey remains silent about his parenthood. After years of a childless marriage, Godfrey tells Nancy the truth, and she agrees to adopt Eppie. Silas tells Godfrey that Eppie was given to him when Godfrey refused the blessing of his child. Think of an opportunity that you passed up that seemed to go to another person. Why did you pass up the opportunity? How did it make you feel to see someone else take advantage of that opportunity? What would you do differently if the opportunity was offered to you now?

Understanding Characterization Until Eppie becomes part of his life, Silas is a lonely man who keeps to himself. After he decides to rear Eppie, he makes new contacts with the people of Raveloe. Think of a different scenario, other than taking in Eppie, in which Silas could have changed his ways and become a part of Raveloe. Write and perform a skit that shows what happens to Silas to change his ways.

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Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Silas was affiliated with a religious group in Lantern Yard that he said was different than the church in Raveloe. He was not familiar with christening when Dolly Winthrop said he needed to have the child christened, but she was not familiar with the practice of determining guilt by casting lots. Research religions that were practiced in England at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Write a paragraph about each one in which you describe practices unique to that religion. Also note how the religions were similar.

Understanding Sequence Dunsey's skeleton is found with Silas's money sixteen years after it was stolen. Godfrey finally tells Nancy the truth about Eppie, and they agree to adopt Eppie. Think about what changes there would have been in the story if the body had been found a week or month after the robbery. How might it have affected Godfrey's decisions? How would it have changed Eppie and Silas's lives?