

Before You Read

Ethan Frome Chapter IX

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Is there such a thing as an “impossible situation?” Why might one believe that there is no such thing as an impossible situation?

Journal

In your journal, describe a situation that could be considered impossible or unbearable. Then try identify some strategies for coping with that situation.

Setting a Purpose

Read to learn how Ethan and Mattie arrive at a shocking solution to their problem.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

The spinal cord is the bundle of nerves that extends from the base of the brain to the waist and relays messages from the brain to the rest of the body. When the spinal cord is damaged, messages can't be relayed properly, and full or partial paralysis results. This condition is called Spinal Cord Injury, or SCI, and it can be caused either by an accident or a disease. Although people who have SCI may experience some improvement within the first year and a half of the injury, the vast majority of those who suffer from the condition do not heal significantly after that time.

Tragedy

A tragedy is a drama in which the main character suffers a downfall as a result of a fatal character flaw, error in judgment, or force beyond human control, such as fate. Traditionally, the tragic hero is a person of high rank, who, out of an exaggerated sense of power or pride, violates a human, natural, or divine law. By breaking the law, the hero poses a threat to society and causes suffering to family members, friends, and associates.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

exaltation [eg' zôl tã' shən] *n.* feeling of great rapture or well-being (p. 68)

imploring [im plôr' ing] *adj.* asking earnestly (p. 62)

inarticulate [in' är tik' yə lit] *adj.* not clearly expressed (p. 64)

lineaments [lin' ē mənt] *n.* features (p. 70)

querulous [kwər' ə ləs] *adj.* whining or complaining (p. 71)

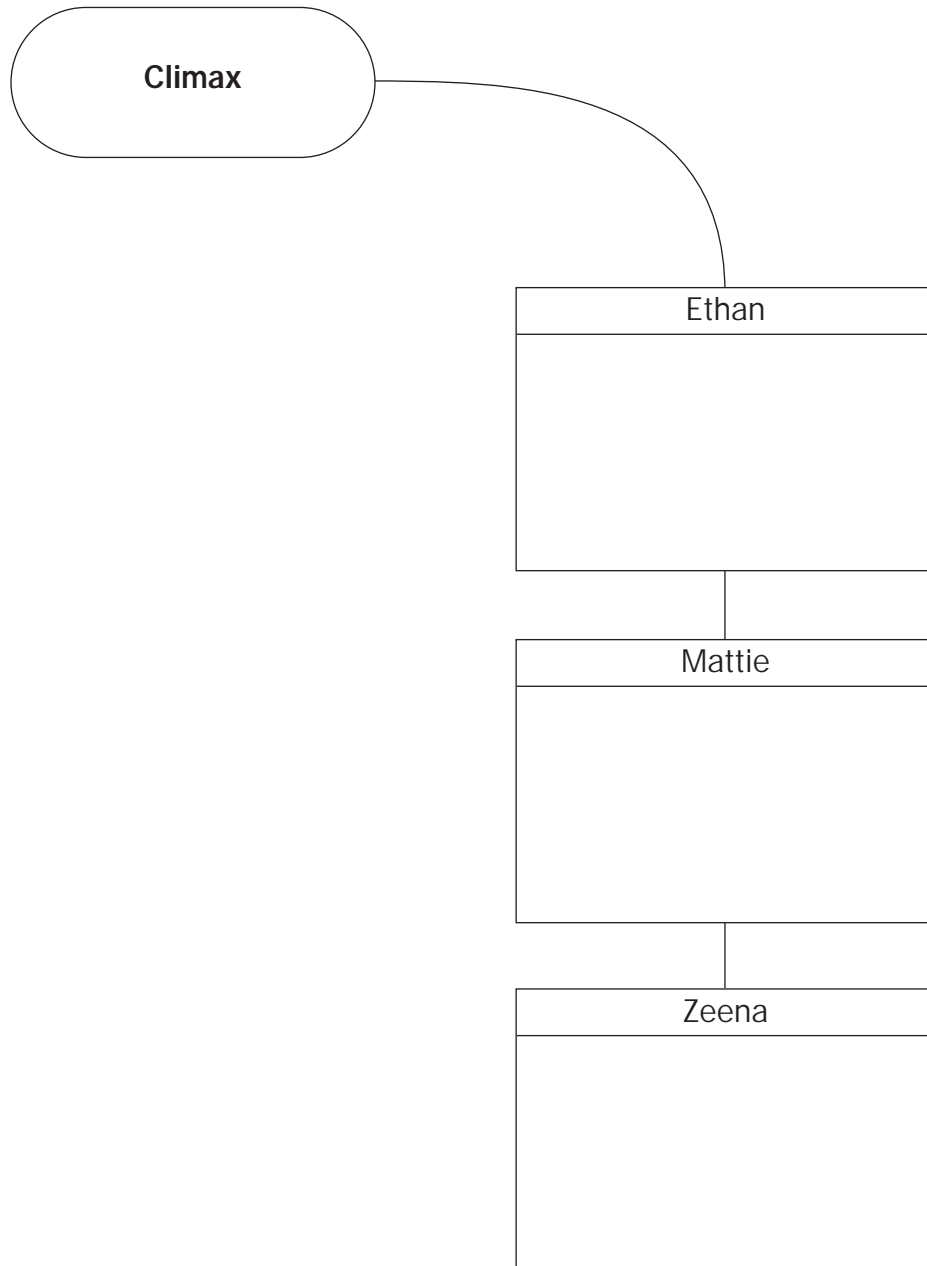
slatternly [slat' ərn lē] *adj.* neglected and dirty (p. 71)

uncouth [un kōōth'] *adj.* odd or clumsy (p. 64)

Active Reading

Ethan Frome Chapter IX

The climax of the novella occurs in this chapter. Use the organizer below to describe the climax and to note how each of the main characters contributes to it.



Responding

Ethan Frome Chapter IX

Personal Response

Describe the emotions that ran through your mind as you read the final five pages. Were you surprised, or did you expect this ending?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Where do Ethan and Mattie first stop on their ride, and how do they act toward each other?

2. What is Ethan's motive for stopping at the crest of the Corbury Road? What is their first ride down together like?

3. What idea does Mattie suggest and why?

4. What does Ethan mean when he says, "I know we can fetch it"? What image does he suddenly see, and how does he react?

5. How does Mrs. Hale describe Ethan Frome's life after the accident? Why does she make this assessment of him?

Responding

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Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

6. In the beginning of the novella, Ethan opens the door to his house for the narrator, but the narrator does not describe what he sees until the final chapter. How does this technique affect the reader?

7. The last lines in the book suggest that the Fromes in the graveyard might actually be luckier than the ones in the house. Do you agree or not, and why?

Literature and Writing

Whom Do You Blame?

Who or what is responsible for the outcome of this novella? Write a few paragraphs explaining who or what caused the conditions that the narrator observes in Ethan Frome's house.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Review the list of actions that you generated in the **Focus Activity** on page 28. Within your small group, debate whether the main characters in *Ethan Frome* found themselves in an impossible situation. Consider what alternatives might have been open to them. Do you agree with the words of Mrs. Hale that “[I]f she’d ha’ died, Ethan might ha’ lived.” Why or why not?

Internet Connection

Use the Internet to find out more about Edith Wharton and *Ethan Frome*. Try to find critics’ comments about the novella, Wharton’s comments about the book, and readers’ responses to the work.



Save your work for your portfolio.