

# Before You Read

## *Ethan Frome* Chapters VI–VIII

### FOCUS ACTIVITY

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Have you ever had to make a difficult decision and felt pulled in opposite directions? What helped you to arrive at the decision?

#### Quickwrite

Jot down the strategies you use that help you make difficult decisions.

#### Setting a Purpose

Read to discover what motivates Ethan Frome to make a very difficult decision.

### BACKGROUND

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#### Did You Know?

In the mid-nineteenth century, medicine was extremely primitive by today's standards, especially for women. Many doctors had little or no formal training, and women's complaints were considered either to be related to childbearing or of psychological origin. Out of modesty, many women would not discuss issues openly with their physicians; nor did they submit to thorough examinations. Worse yet, prescribed medicines often contained little besides alcohol or addictive painkillers. People could order medications by mail, which they might take for years, convinced of their effectiveness. In many instances, however, the patients were getting worse rather than better.

#### Plot Structure

In most stories, the plot follows a predictable pattern. It begins with the **exposition**, or the introduction of the characters, setting, and conflict. Then it proceeds to the **rising action**, or the events that result from the conflict. These events build up to a final **climax**, or turning point, before the climax ends in **resolution**. As you read this section of the book, try to identify the stages of the plot as they unfold.

### VOCABULARY PREVIEW

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**almshouse** [ä'mz' hous'] *n.* publicly supported home for the poor; poorhouse (p. 47)

**destitute** [des' tə tōōt'] *adj.* lacking the necessities of life; in absolute want (p. 59)

**incessant** [in ses' ənt] *adj.* continuing without interruption; unceasing (p. 55)

**inexorable** [i nek' sər ə bəl] *adj.* unchangeable; unyielding (p. 56)

**pauper** [pō' pər] *n.* a very poor person (p. 48)

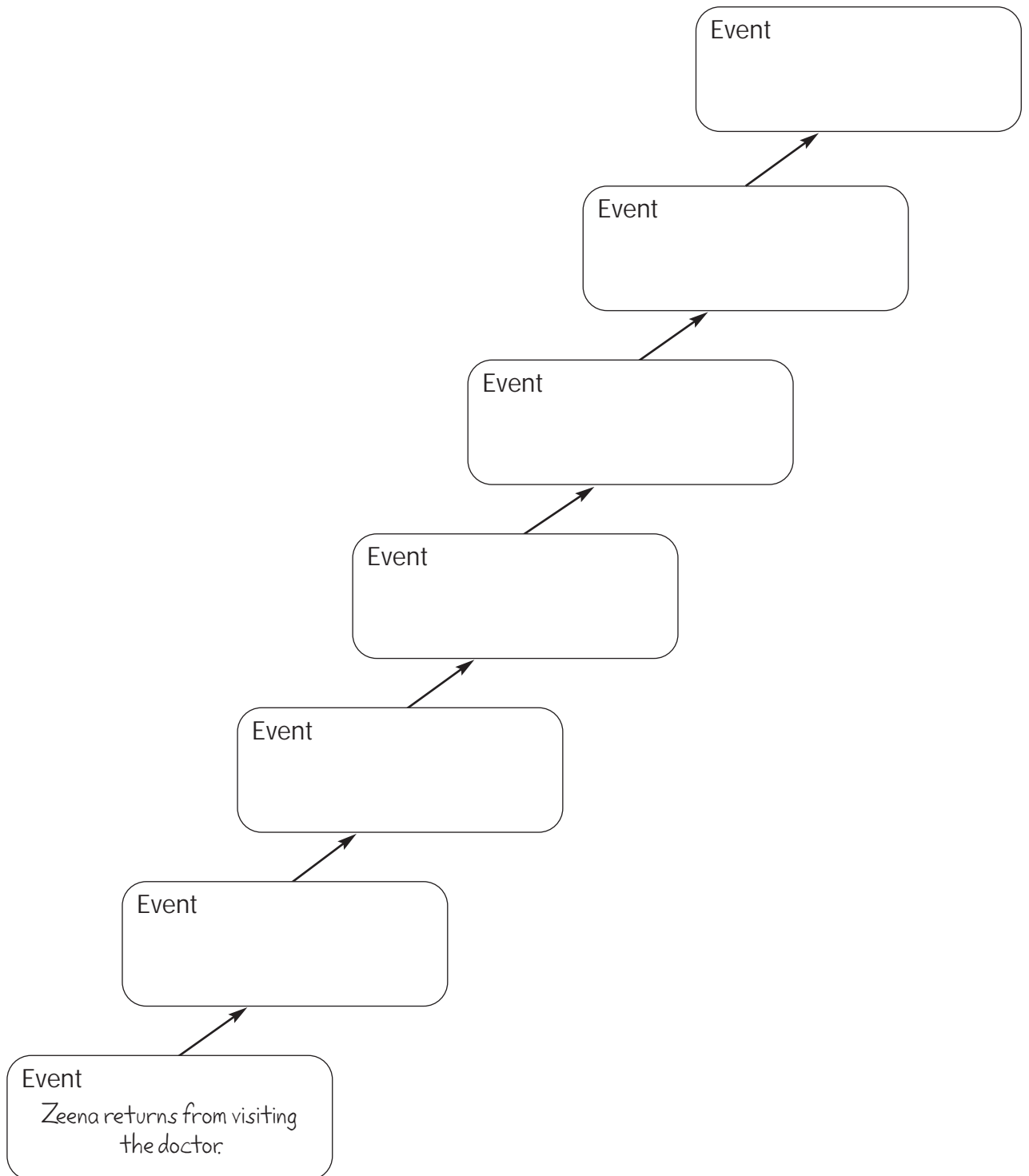
**squalid** [skwol' id] *adj.* having a gloomy, wretched, poverty-stricken appearance (p. 43)

**stoicism** [stō' ə siz' əm] *n.* indifference to pleasure or pain; impassivity (p. 44)

# Active Reading

## *Ethan Frome* Chapters VI–VIII

In this section of the novella, the rising action continues to build toward the climax. Use the boxes below to keep track of the events as they occur.



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# Responding

## *Ethan Frome* Chapters VI–VIII

### Personal Response

For which character do you have the most sympathy? Why?

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### Analyzing Literature

#### Recall and Interpret

1. How did Ethan feel the morning after spending the evening with Mattie, and what contributed to this feeling? Do you think the feeling will last? Why or why not?

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2. What plan does Zeena have when she returns? How does Ethan react at first? What do you think is Zeena's true motive for dismissing Mattie?

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3. What discovery does Zeena make? What does this suggest that she will do?

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4. What two courses of action can Ethan take? What forces make the decision difficult?

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5. Why does Ethan decide to visit Mr. Hale? What does Ethan's change of heart reveal about him?

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# Responding

## *Ethan Frome* Chapters VI–VIII

### Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

#### Evaluate and Connect

6. Review your answer to the **Focus Activity** on page 24. Which of the two emotions prompted Ethan Frome to choose not to take advantage of the Hales' sympathy?

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7. What does the author suggest by Mrs. Hale's statement that she didn't know what Zeena would have done if she hadn't had Ethan to look after her? Is Mrs. Hale aware of Ethan Frome's predicament at the time?

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### Literature and Writing

#### Analyzing Values

In this section of the novella, both Ethan and Zeena make separate references to things or ideals that they value most. Write a paragraph that compares and contrasts these things. What does this indicate about the characters and their relationship to each other?

### Extending Your Response

#### Literature Groups

Reread the parts of Chapter VIII in which Ethan decides whether to leave Zeena and go with Mattie. In your group, discuss his arguments with himself and his decision-making process. What factors might he be overlooking?

#### Health Science Connection

Some illnesses that afflict human beings are psychological in nature and are not necessarily caused by physical ailments. Do you think that Zeena's ailments are caused by her state of mind? Using the Internet and other sources, research the topic of psychosomatic illnesses. Based on the character profile of Zeena, determine whether she might be a victim of these illnesses. Present a brief report to the class, setting forth your position.



*Save your work for your portfolio.*