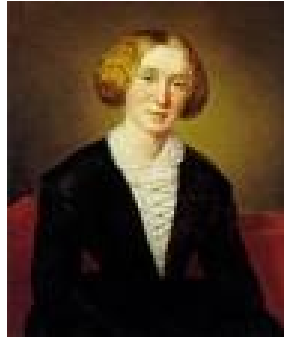


# THE MILL ON THE FLOSS

by George Eliot



## THE AUTHOR

Mary Anne Evans (1819-1880) was born in Warwickshire, England, the youngest daughter of an estate agent (after whom Caleb Garth in her classic *Middlemarch* seems to have been modeled). She was raised as an Evangelical Protestant, but in her early twenties she turned away from the faith of her parents and rejected organized religion, becoming a freethinker. She even translated David Friedrich Strauss' radical *Life of Jesus* and Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* into English, and thus had an impact on the growth of theological liberalism in England.

After spending several years writing for a radical political journal, she began living with married writer George Henry Lewes, creating a scandal in English society. She continued to live with him until his death in 1878. It was with Lewes' encouragement that she began to write works of fiction under the pseudonym of George Eliot. Her first full-length novel, *Adam Bede*, published in 1859, was widely acclaimed, as were its successors, *The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner*. After trying her hand at historical and political novels, she returned to the environment she knew best with her classic *Middlemarch*, published in serial form in 1871-2. In 1880, she married John Walter Cross, who was twenty years her junior. She died two months later.

George Eliot is best remembered as a writer who possessed peerless insight into human character. She understood and communicated with great skill the motives and intents of the heart, and demonstrated herself to be a shrewd observer of the English class system and its fine distinctions. Her use of the English language demonstrated her to be a fine stylist, and her wide-ranging knowledge of history, literature, art, and science placed her in a realm rarely visited by women in Victorian England. In fact, her writings were often criticized by her contemporaries because women were expected to confine themselves to the sphere of vapid romance.

*The Mill on the Floss* is the most autobiographical of Eliot's novels. Like Maggie, she was raised in the country as the daughter of an estate manager whom she loved dearly, experienced a conversion to Christianity in her teens, and was rejected by her beloved brother when she ran away with a married man. Her attitude toward the atmosphere of the English countryside is portrayed in all its beauty and all its limitations and ugliness. Eliot was a realist, and in her writing sought to picture people as they really are without passing judgment, yet such judgments are inevitable, as any reader of this penetrating novel can clearly see.

## PLOT SUMMARY

### BOOK ONE – BOY AND GIRL

The story centers on Dorlcote Mill on the river Floss near the village of St. Ogg's. As the book opens, Mr. Tulliver, the proprietor of the mill, is discussing with his wife the need to get their son Tom a good education; his fervent hope is that Tom will be able to help him win his frequent legal battles against his neighbors. Tulliver regrets that Tom is a bit slow and plodding, while their nine-year-old daughter Maggie is the clever one in the family. Tulliver seeks out his friend Riley, the local auctioneer who is better-educated than most of the townsfolk, for advice about where to send Tom for schooling. He does not want Tom to be a miller like himself for fear the boy might turn him out before his time. When he makes this disparaging remark about his son, however, Maggie who is reading by the fire, jumps up to defend her brother. After some conversation, Riley recommends a parson named Stelling, an Oxford graduate, who is willing to board and teach a pupil or two for a hundred pounds a year.

Maggie loves her long, black hair and rebels against any attempts by her mother to curl and tame it. On the day when Tom is to return from the academy prior to going to live with Rev. Stelling, she pulls away from her mother while she is trying to brush her hair and hides in the attic – her favorite place when she wants to be alone. There she abuses a doll that she keeps especially for that purpose, then rushes outside to play with her dog Yap and visit the mill, where she talks to Luke Moggs, who operates the mill for her father. She is horrified to discover from Luke that the rabbits that Tom had left in her care had all died because she had forgotten to feed them.

That afternoon thirteen-year-old Tom arrives, eagerly awaited by his mother and his sister, both of whom love him to distraction. Tom gives Maggie a fishing line with hooks that he had bought by saving his own money and looks forward to taking her fishing the next morning. He then goes to see his rabbits, but Maggie fearfully tells him that they have all died. He becomes angry, insisting that he will have Harry fired and telling Maggie that he doesn't love her and won't take her fishing. She begs for forgiveness, which he refuses to grant, leaving her heartbroken. She flees to her hiding place in the attic and cries her heart out, determining not to go downstairs until Tom fetches her and forgives her. When Tom comes to the attic, she flings her arms around him and he can't help returning her caresses. Soon all is forgiven, and the next day he takes her fishing, enjoying the idyllic surroundings together.

Preparations are underway for the visit of the aunts and uncles for the consultation concerning Tom's schooling. Tom and Maggie raid the kitchen and go outside to devour jam puffs, then Tom runs off to join his friend Bob Jakin in catching rats. Before they can engage in the sport, however, they begin fighting over a halfpenny, after which Tom stalks off, breaking his friendship with Bob. Meanwhile, Jane Glegg is the first of the aunts to arrive, and she no sooner settles in than she begins expressing her opinions freely and criticizing her poor relations. Later the Pullets drive up, with Sophy Pullet weeping inconsolably over the death of a distant acquaintance from a case of dropsy. Finally Mr. and Mrs. Deane arrive with her daughter Lucy in tow, after which Tom and Maggie walk in with their father and Mr. Glegg. The aunts immediately begin criticizing Maggie's hair, which is long, straight, and unkempt. Maggie rushes up to the attack, dragging Tom along with her, and promptly cuts her hair, leaving a jagged mess on top of her head. Tom bursts out laughing and goes back downstairs to dinner, leaving Maggie to sob uncontrollably in front of the mirror. Finally she comes downstairs, causing the men to

break out laughing and the women to rain criticism on her childish head. Her father takes her part, however, and the children are soon dismissed to take their dessert out into the garden. After they leave, Mr. Tulliver announces his intention of sending Tom to school with a clergyman, much to the surprise of his relations. Aunt Glegg naturally interjects her negative comments, but Mr. Deane notes that Lawyer Wakem, the richest man in the region, intends to send his hunchbacked son to a clergyman as well, so that the decision might not be a bad one. Aunt Glegg and Mr. Tulliver soon quarrel, and the Gleggs leave in a huff, after which the women go out to find the children while the men talk politics, about which they clearly know nothing.

That evening, Bessy wonders aloud what they might do if her sister Glegg were to recall the loan of five hundred pounds that she had granted them. Mr. Tulliver, who hates to be beholden to his wife's relatives, says he would happily pay her back. The next day, he goes to visit his sister, Mrs. Moss, to whom he had earlier lent three hundred pounds, figuring that her repayment could allow him to get Mrs. Glegg off his back. He demands that Moss repay the loan, but the poor man insists that the only way he could do that is to sell everything he owns. Tulliver remains firm and rides off, but soon softens, thinking that he must treat his sister in the way he hopes Tom will treat Maggie when the two are grown, and goes back to Mrs. Moss, assuring her that she can have the money a little longer.

The next day the Tullivers prepare for a visit to Garum Firs, the farm of Mr. and Mrs. Pullet. Pullet is a prosperous gentleman farmer, and the children enjoy taking in the marvels of the place. Bessy, on the other hand, takes pleasure in admiring her sister's new bonnet. Maggie, as usual, manages to get herself into trouble, dropping a sweetcake on the floor and stepping on it, then spilling a glass of wine when she tries to hug her brother. The children soon go outside to play. Tom pays attention to Lucy, who has accompanied them, while ignoring Maggie entirely. When he proposes going to a nearby pond, completely contrary to the instructions they have been given, the girls readily come along. When he shows Lucy a water snake and insists that Maggie go back home, she pushes Lucy into the mud in a fit of anger. When Lucy returns to the house, Aunt Pullet is appalled for fear that her carpet and furniture might get soiled, while Bessy is ashamed because of the behavior of her children. When she goes to seek them, she finds Tom tormenting the farm animals, but Maggie is nowhere in sight. She then arranges for a carriage to take the family home, hoping to catch up to Maggie on the road.

Maggie, meanwhile, is determined to run away and go live with the Gypsies. Soon she encounters two tramps, to whom she gives sixpence, her only money, and later stumbles into an actual Gypsy encampment. She is quickly disabused of her romantic illusions, as she finds the Gypsies dirty, ignorant, and lacking in basic foodstuffs. They treat her kindly, however, and arrange to take her home. On the way she meets her father, who comforts her and makes sure Sophy and Tom say no more to her about the day's adventures.

The author now takes time to describe the town of St. Ogg's, the home of Mr. and Mrs. Glegg. It is a quiet, peaceful conservative village named after a boatman who supposedly ferried the Virgin Mary across the Floss one night. Glegg is a retired wool merchant, tight with his money and given to gardening as a hobby, while his wife occupies herself minding other people's business and congratulating herself on her own superiority. The next morning at breakfast he hopes to talk her around to ending her quarrel with her brother-in-law Tulliver, but is confronted instead with a rebuke for failing to take her part with sufficient enthusiasm. Once she calms down, he convinces her not to call in her five hundred pound loan to the Tullivers. The next day, however, Tulliver writes her a letter promising to repay the loan within a month, though he has no idea how he will accomplish such a thing.

## BOOK TWO - SCHOOL-TIME

Tom now goes off to school under the tutelage of Rev. Stelling, a young and ambitious clergyman who is completely different from the old codger who had taught Tom in grammar school. He is intimidated by the man's knowledge, sonorous speech, different set of values, and even by his sense of humor. In grammar school Tom had gained respect by fighting and ignoring his studies, but he has no such opportunity in an establishment where he is the only pupil. In fact, he struggles mightily to absorb the instruction he is given, leading Stelling to conclude that his student is both dull and lacking in motivation, though Tom's practical knowledge far outstrips that of his teacher. He grows so lonely from lack of companionship that he even takes a shine to little Laura Stelling, for whom he is often called upon to babysit. In late October Mr. Tulliver and Maggie pay Tom a visit. Maggie stays for two weeks and takes great pleasure in the very subjects Tom detests. Needless to say, Tom is relieved when the semester ends and he is able to come home for the holidays.

Snow blankets the fields and all is warm and snug within, but Mr. Tulliver soon ruins the atmosphere by exclaiming loudly against a farmer named Pivart who intends to divert water from the nearby stream to cultivate his crops, thus decreasing the water power available to Dorlcote Mill. Tulliver's intended response, of course, is to file a lawsuit. His anger at the offending Pivart is nothing compared to his wrath at the man he perceives to be at the root of all his problems: the wealthy lawyer Wakem, whom he hates with a passion. When Tom hears that Wakem intends to send his son Philip to Stelling's school, however, Tulliver is surprisingly pleased, figuring that if Wakem sends his son to Stelling, the tutor must be a worthy one. Tom, however, is disappointed only because Philip is deformed, and therefore is not a good candidate for a thrashing.

In January Tom returns to school, and for the first time encounters his hunchbacked neighbor Philip Wakem. Tom is prepared to dislike the son of so wicked a father as Lawyer Wakem, and Philip is shy because of his deformity. Once the two boys break the ice and begin to converse, Tom is astounded at Philip's drawing ability and frankly surprised that he seems kind and pleasant. When Tom discovers that Philip knows many "fighting stories" about the ancient Greeks and the Crusades, he is eager to hear them, but when he invites Philip to go fishing with him, he is disappointed to discover that Philip has no interest in that sport or in any other. As time passes, the two enjoy one another's company, with Philip telling Tom stories and helping him with his Latin, but Tom cannot escape his repulsion for Philip's deformity or the conviction that Philip should be his enemy. Philip, on his part, is very self-conscious and sensitive to any perceived slight. They have their first real quarrel when Tom coerces his drillmaster, an old soldier named Poulter, to give a sword demonstration and interrupts Philip's piano practice to invite him to see it. The two exchange harsh words, with Philip belittling Tom's intelligence and Tom insulting Philip's family. After the rather lame demonstration, Tom convinces Poulter to lend him the sword in exchange for a five-shilling piece.

Soon Maggie comes for another visit, and is immediately impressed with Philip's cleverness, as he is with her quick dark eyes. The day of her arrival, Tom takes her upstairs to her room, tells her to close her eyes, then emerges from the closet made up as a rough approximation of the Duke of Wellington and carrying Poulter's sword. As he begins to swing it around, terrifying Maggie in the process, he loses control and it falls to the ground, landing on his foot and causing him to pass out. He is afraid that he will be lame for life, but Philip consults

the doctor and assures him that he will soon be walking again. One day Maggie finds herself alone with Philip and strikes up a conversation. He envies her friendship with Tom and wishes he had a sister to love him. Maggie tells him she will love him too, though not as well as Tom, and to prove it she gives him a kiss.

In the years that follow, Tom and Philip continue to study under Rev. Stelling while Maggie goes to Miss Firniss' boarding school. Maggie continues to send her love to Philip when she writes to Tom, but rarely has the chance to see him. When Wakem represents Pivart in Tulliver's lawsuit over water rights, Tom is told by his father to have nothing more to do with Philip, and Maggie gives up all hope of continued friendship. One day Maggie appears at the home of the Stellings to tell Tom that Tulliver has lost the lawsuit, meaning that he is likely to lose the mill as well, leaving them with no source of livelihood. Worse yet, their father had suffered a fall from his horse and was seriously ill and practically unresponsive. Tom and Maggie, now sixteen and thirteen respectively, hurry home, knowing that their lives have been changed forever.

### BOOK THREE - THE DOWNFALL

After losing the lawsuit, Tulliver decided that he must sell the land and mill and remain there as a tenant, paying his debts with the profits from the business. To complicate matters, he had offered his furniture as security for an earlier loan, and now faced the loss of that as well, forcing him to turn to his wife's relatives for help. Next he found that the mortgage on his property had been transferred to none other than the despised Lawyer Wakem. Shortly after receiving word of this misfortune, he fell off his horse, leaving him in such a condition that he recognized only Maggie. When her mother sends her to fetch Tom from school and he finds out the nature of the situation, he immediately blames Wakem and insists that Maggie never speak to Philip again. When they arrive home, the bailiff is already preparing to sell off their possessions. Their mother is in the attic mourning the impending loss of her china and needlework while her husband lies unconscious on his bed.

When the members of the family come together for a consultation, Bessy's sisters talk of buying the best things from her at cut-rate prices. Jane Glegg assures her that they will purchase the bare necessities and give them to her so her family doesn't wind up in the poorhouse, but tells her that she must be humble and not expect to be left with anything more than that on account of the scandal that her husband has brought on the family. She also insists that the children be brought in so they can be made to understand what they must suffer for their father's faults. When Tom comes down, he cuts through all the false piety and suggests that if his aunts really want to keep their sister from being "sold up," they should give the inheritance they intended for him and Maggie now so their mother doesn't have to auction off her possessions. They remind him that he has forgotten the interest they would receive on the money in the intervening years, but he offers to work to pay that off each year instead. Mr. Glegg approves of Tom's spirit, though his wife retorts angrily, but he also notes that legal fees will eat up the value of the furniture even if it is spared temporarily. Maggie, able to take no more of this, explodes and asks her aunts why they bothered coming at all if they had no intention of helping their sister's family. She follows this up by asserting that her father, the brunt of so much criticism, is better than any of them and surely would have helped them had they been in need. In the midst of the quarrel, Gritty Moss, Tulliver's sister, appears. She commiserates with Bessy, but says they are unable to pay back the three hundred pounds lent to them. Bessy, who knew nothing of this loan, is taken aback, but

Tom quickly speaks up and tells everyone that his father had told him that the loan was never to be recalled if the Mosses could not pay it back. Eager to implement the sick man's wishes, the company goes to seek the note in order to destroy it so Tulliver's creditors cannot demand the money from the Mosses. As they search for it, Tulliver suddenly wakes up, confirms the fact that the note against Moss is to be destroyed, then falls again into an insensible state.

The next day Tom seeks advice from his uncle Deane about finding a job so he can support his mother and sister. Deane informs him that his education is of no value in the business world – that he would have been better off studying bookkeeping rather than Latin - and that his youth limits his prospects. When he tells all this to Maggie, she despairs of ever finding a better life than the one she knows. A week later the family's furniture is auctioned off. Afterward, Bob Jakin appears asking for Tom, who fails to recognize him. Bob has been working as a bargeman and tending a furnace, and he had the good luck to put out a fire at the mill where the furnace was located. As a reward, the owner had given him ten sovereigns. He had used on to buy a goose for his mother and some clothing for himself, but now offers the other nine to Tom because he has heard that the family is in trouble. Tom is very grateful, but refuses the money, insisting that he must earn his own way; Maggie, however, offers her eternal friendship, promising to contact him if they ever have any need that he can help to meet.

In the weeks that follow, Tulliver makes slow but steady progress, but the joy of his partial recovery is lost in the impending sale of all that remained to him and his family – livestock, land, and buildings, including the mill itself. Uncle Deane tries to help, seeking to convince his firm Guest and Company, to buy the mill and keep Tulliver on as manager. He also finds Tom temporary employment in the warehouse and puts him in touch with someone who can teach him to do accounts, though he finds the rough world of the warehouse disagreeable after the sheltered life of the academy. Meanwhile, Mrs. Tulliver decides to go directly to Wakem and beg him not to buy the land and mill on which he holds the mortgage, leaving it to Guest and Co. instead. Her plan backfires, however, when her plea convinces Wakem, who had given no thought previously to doing so, to buy the mill and make Tulliver his unwilling servant. When he does so, all the family members but Tom believe Tulliver should accept Wakem's generous offer of employment. Tulliver, though humiliated at the prospect, decides to stay on at the mill under Wakem's ownership. He refuses to forgive his old adversary, however, and even insists that Tom write a curse against Wakem in the pages of the family Bible and sign it, though the idea horrifies Maggie.

## BOOK FOUR – THE VALLEY OF HUMILIATION

The author begins Book IV by speaking of the traditional brand of religion followed by the simple citizens who people the novel. They have a strict form of morality that has little to do with Christianity and much to do with family, status, and common sense. Life has now settled into a dreary routine for the Tulliver family. Mr. Tulliver is able to manage the business that now belongs to Wakem, but finds no joy in it and is unwilling to socialize with neighbors as of old, ashamed of the debt that burdens him down. His wife regrets the loss of her beloved possessions and hates the fact that she must constantly economize because of the family's debt. Tom goes to work every day, but has become bitter against his parents for the state to which they have reduced the family. Maggie, on the other hand, lives the life of the imagination, still lacking the maturity to understand fully the family's plight.

One day as Maggie is reading a book outside her house, Bob Jakin arrives, bringing with him books and pictures he has bought for her. He remembers how much she regretted the loss of the family books in the auction, and decides to make up for it in a small way. His love for the young beauty is obvious, though Maggie is oblivious to his attentions. Soon she pulls out Tom's old schoolbooks and begins to study them, hoping for a level of attainment common only among boys. In the process she comes across *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis, and finds in his advocacy of self-denial and a life of resignation a peaceful solution to her constant striving and discontent. She then begins reading the Bible, and in the process becomes such a humble and self-effacing creature that her mother wonders at the change in her.

## BOOK FIVE – WHEAT AND TARES

After some years abroad, Philip Wakem, now a young man of twenty-one, returns home. The first time Maggie, now seventeen, sees him, she remembers their friendship but realizes that circumstances dictate that they can never be friends again. One day she goes to a secluded glen near the mill called Red Deeps, where she likes to be alone and think. Suddenly Philip appears; he has followed her so they can renew their acquaintance. That his affection for her has grown and matured soon becomes apparent; he had five years earlier painted a watercolor of her in the schoolroom, which he pulls out and shows her, then tells her that she is far more beautiful than he remembered. Maggie draws back, insisting that the animosity between their fathers means that they can never be friends, but Philip argues that children should not follow such paternal wishes when they are clearly wrong. He begs her to let him visit her in Red Deeps occasionally, even holding out the hope that their friendship might be the means of reconciling their fathers. She demurs, and when he offers her a book, she refuses it, but when they part he determines to continue trying to see her in the hope that one day she might return his love.

Tom, meanwhile, is prospering in his work in the warehouse, watched over by his uncle Deane. He pursues single-mindedly his desire to pay off his father's debts and will allow nothing to stand in his way. When Bob Jakin makes one of his frequent visits, he offers Tom a business proposition: Why not take some of the money he has saved from his labors and invest it in a trading venture with a man of Bob's acquaintance? When Tom speaks to his father about the proposal, the old man refuses, so Tom decides to seek money from his uncle Glegg in return for a portion of the profits. Glegg shows interest in the proposal, but they are soon interrupted by his wife with her usual sour attitude toward everything. Surprisingly, Bob succeeds in sweet-talking her into participating in the venture. In the days that follow, Tom, with Bob's help begins to accumulate a tidy sum. He is now confident that he will soon be able to pay off his father's debts.

The next time Maggie goes to the Red Deeps, she is prepared to tell Philip that they may never meet again. Her rationale is simple – continued meeting will require concealment, which clearly would be wrong, and if they are caught the result will be misery for all concerned. Rather than arguing with her, Philip asks if they can enjoy one another's company for one last time. He has begun an oil painting of her in the Red Deeps, and he wants to gaze at her face in order to fix it in his memory. He tries to convince her then that her self-abnegation will one day destroy her. She holds fast to her commitment, but he finally convinces her to allow him to walk in the glade on his own; after all, if they met then, it would not be concealment but coincidence.

For the next ten months, they meet regularly. Philip brings her books, they discuss them together, and the bond between them deepens. On day in April he finally gets the courage to

express his love to her, and she is shocked; she had never even considered the possibility of anything more than a brother-sister relationship between them. In fact, she had never imagined that any man could love her. She candidly tells Philip that she could never love anyone more than she loves him, but refuses to act on their love in any way that would injure her father. They share a tender kiss, and Maggie rushes home.

Despite Maggie's desperate attempts, she is unable to keep her meetings with Philip a secret forever. At dinner one day, Aunt Pullet remarks about having seen Philip emerging from the Red Deeps on several occasions. The blush that crosses Maggie's face raises suspicions in Tom, who decides to keep his eyes open. One day he sees Philip heading toward the Red Deeps. He then hurries home, just in time to catch Maggie on her way out the door. He charges her with disobeying his commands and his father's wishes and demands to know what has transpired between the two. She tells him that they had become friends, had met regularly, that Philip had lent her books, and that they had recently professed their love for one another. Tom is predictably furious and insists that Maggie either swear never to see Philip again or he will tell their father everything. Maggie reluctantly agrees, though she begs to see Philip once more in order to tell him that they must part. Tom determines to accompany her to the Red Deeps for that purpose. When they arrive he confronts Philip, insults him, demands that he never see Maggie again, then drags his sister away bodily. Maggie then tells Tom what she really thinks of his bullying, but he is impervious to her feelings. He goes off to the warehouse, while Maggie goes home and pours out her sorrows in a flood of tears.

Three weeks later, Tom gathers the family to announce that his trading ventures have brought in enough money to pay off his father's debts. All are overjoyed, though Tulliver can't help gloating at his triumph over Wakem and exhorting Tom to get the mill back at the nearest possible opportunity. The next day the bills are paid, and on the ride home Tulliver rehearses in his mind what he will say if he meets Wakem. Soon his opportunity arises, and he insults his tormentor, throws him off his horse, and begins to flog him with a whip. Hearing the commotion, Maggie runs out and pulls her father off the injured lawyer, who with some help mounts the horse and rides for home. Tulliver, meanwhile, is on the verge of collapse from the excitement of the encounter. In the middle of the night he calls his family together. Despite Maggie's pleadings, he refuses to forgive Wakem and dies shortly thereafter.

## BOOK SIX – THE GREAT TEMPTATION

As the next book begins, two years have passed and we meet for the first time Stephen Guest, the young scion of the richest family in St. Ogg's. The young man is enjoying the company of Lucy Deane, whom he is in the process of courting. Lucy tells him that her cousin Maggie, who has spent the last two years teaching in a girls' school, is coming for a visit. Stephen is convinced that his best friend Philip Wakem is in love, but has no idea with whom, and Lucy wonders if Maggie shares the antipathy toward Philip openly expressed by her brother, since Philip will be joining them as well. Lucy's mother has recently died, and the widowed Mrs. Tulliver is now keeping house for Lucy's father. After Stephen and Lucy sing a duet they part, intending to meet in a few days so Lucy can introduce Stephen to her cousin.

After Maggie arrives, she and Lucy discuss Stephen and his relationship with Lucy. Maggie then relieves Lucy's anxiety by assuring her that the presence of Philip Wakem in their midst will cause her no pain whatsoever. When Stephen arrives, he and Maggie make immediate,



though not entirely favorable, impressions on one another. Lucy is pleased that they like one another more than she feared, but is vaguely uncomfortable with the banter that soon arises between them. That evening, Maggie enjoys Stephen's singing far too much for her own good, and is troubled by her own reaction. Later Lucy comes to Maggie's bedroom, and the latter reveals to her cousin her frustrated love for Philip Wakem. Lucy, kind-hearted as always, begins to consider some way in which she might overcome the barriers that separate her two friends.

Maggie, determined to keep her promise, insists that she must secure Tom's permission before allowing herself to be in Philip's company. She goes to visit Tom, who is lodging with Bob Jakin and his new wife. When she tells him that she intends to see Philip Wakem, his reaction is negative as one would anticipate, even when she assures him that they will only be together in company and never alone with one another. He condemns her wickedness and insists that he cannot trust her to keep her word, and reminds her that, should she choose to renew her desire for anything greater than a quiet friendship with Philip, she must give up all ties to her brother.

Tom has been asked by his employers to take a business trip to Newcastle, but before he leaves, Mr. Deane asks him in and offers him a partnership in the firm as a reward for his good work over the last seven years. Tom is very grateful, but in the process of expressing his thanks asks if Guest and Co. might still be interested in purchasing the Dorlcote Mill, which Tom had promised his father to bring back into the family if at all possible. Deane doubts that such a thing is possible – willingness on Wakem's part to give it up is unlikely – but promises to keep it in mind.

In the weeks that follow, Maggie is introduced into St. Ogg's society and makes quite a favorable impression, though Philip has yet to make an appearance because of a sketching trip. Stephen constantly seeks to draw Maggie into the conversation when the three of them are together, and subconsciously is more attentive to Lucy to compensate for the constant focus on her lively cousin. When the two are alone together, however, they rarely exchange a word. On the day Philip returns from his trip, Lucy goes to help at the church bazaar and Maggie is left alone. Soon Stephen appears, and the awkwardness between them becomes a palpable tension. He invites her to walk in the garden, and both of them feel something which neither of them welcomes. Stephen soon walks off, furious at what he is allowing to happen to him, while Maggie goes back inside and bursts into tears, wishing she could be with Philip again in the Red Deeps.

Philip arrives the next morning to pay a call. Maggie tells him of her conversation with Tom and assures him that they may be friends, but that she must soon go away again to resume a life of her own. Stephen then enters, and the awkwardness that had arisen between him and Maggie surfaces again, though Lucy has no idea of its meaning. As they sing and play, Stephen becomes increasingly attentive to Maggie, which both thrills her and makes her uncomfortable, and Philip notices her reaction. After dinner, Lucy's father tries to find out if Philip's father might be willing to sell Dorlcote Mill, and Lucy, knowing the reason for his question, begs to be able to take Philip into her confidence and enlist his aid in the venture.

Three days later, Philip brings his father up to his attic studio and shows him his paintings, including two of Maggie. He then confesses his love for her and his desire to marry her, after which Wakem storms out in a rage. Philip goes down the river for dinner, and after he returns has a terrible dream in which he sees Maggie plunging down a waterfall and is unable to help her. Later that night, however, Wakem relents, speaks to Philip further on the matter, and gives his consent to the marriage. Philip then easily convinces him to sell the mill to Guest and Co. as a means of eventually transferring ownership back to the Tullivers.

The day of the charity bazaar finally arrives, and all the young ladies of St. Ogg's are sitting at their booths and selling their wares. Maggie's beauty stands out above the others because it remains unornamented by fancy dress; she wears only a plain white frock borrowed from her aunt Pullet's attic, but soon draws a crowd of men from the region. Stephen makes a point of ignoring her, which pleases both of them, though they clearly are struggling with the feelings they have for one another. Philip, observing Stephen's behavior from afar, becomes angry at his signs of preference for Maggie despite his engagement to Lucy, and Stephen realizes that something is going on between Philip and Maggie. Meanwhile, the parish pastor, Mr. Kenn, senses that Maggie is troubled and offers to help her should she ever need someone to whom to speak. Lucy had told Maggie about the agreement between Philip and his father, thinking Maggie would be overjoyed. Instead, Maggie determines to leave the area and take a teaching job with her former instructor. When Lucy asks her why she must leave, she says that she could never marry Philip, despite the fact that she loves him dearly, because that would mean permanent alienation from Tom.

That evening, the Guests sponsor a dance. Maggie largely stays to one side, while Stephen studiously ignores her and pays his court to Lucy. Later, he comes to her and the two go into the conservatory. Stephen, overwhelmed by her beauty, seizes her arm and begins to kiss it, at which point she flees, feeling both anger and guilt at the betrayal of Lucy and Philip implicit in their feelings. The next morning, as Maggie prepares to leave to visit her aunt Moss, Philip arrives to say goodbye and to ask if any hope for them remains. Maggie again professes her love, but insists that she will never lose her brother by marrying Philip.

On the fourth day of Maggie's visit with aunt Moss, Stephen Guest rides up to the farm, saying he has a message for Maggie. As they walk, he professes his love for her and insists that he would readily offer her marriage were he not already entangled with Lucy. Neither one can deny the reality of their mutual feelings, and Stephen argues that neither engagement – his with Lucy or hers with Philip – is formal, therefore both of them are really free to pursue other attractions. Not only that, but it would be false to follow through on planned connections when their feelings lay elsewhere. Maggie, however, refuses to seek her own happiness by sacrificing others, though Stephen demands and receives one passionate kiss before they part. After he leaves, Maggie falls sobbing into her aunt's tender arms.

While Maggie is away, Wakem makes arrangements for Tom to take possession of Dorlcote Mill, with his mother keeping house for him. Maggie first hears about these arrangements when she arrives at the home of aunt Pullet for a visit. The aunts soon discuss what they will give Tom to get him started in his own home, but when Tom arrives, Lucy pulls him aside. She tells him about Philip's role in getting him the mill and about the elder Wakem's change of heart toward Maggie, hoping that these confidences will result in an alteration of Tom attitude as well. Sadly, she knows little of her cousin's makeup, and he responds only with the angry insistence that, while Maggie may do as she pleases, he can never countenance such a union and will have nothing to do with her should she pursue it.

A week later, Maggie continues her round of visits by returning to the Deane home and spending her days with aunt Glegg. Lucy insists that she return to St. Ogg's in the evening, where Stephen unaccountably begins frequenting the Deane dinner table. Philip also drops in occasionally, and soon senses some connection between Stephen and Maggie. When a boating excursion on the river is proposed, Stephen declines, and Lucy quickly plans a shopping trip so Maggie and Philip can have some time alone together. Philip, however, tortured by his

suspicious, sends word that he is sick and begs Stephen to take his place in the boat, not realizing that Lucy has also declined to go. Maggie is startled when Stephen appears in Philip's place, but is unable to bring herself to refuse the journey. They row down the river for hours, so absorbed in one another's company that Maggie doesn't notice when they pass their intended destination. By that time they are far downriver. When Maggie takes alarm at being so far from home with Stephen, he proposes that they simply get married and never return. The weather begins to change as they drift downstream, and Stephen arranges for them to be taken aboard a Dutch trading vessel making for the coast. When Maggie awakes the next morning, she is horrified at her own selfishness and breach of trust. As they approach the town of Mudport that evening, Stephen speaks of taking a carriage onward in their journey, but Maggie tells him that he will be traveling alone; she intends to return home by whatever means available. Stephen tries to convince her that the damage has already been done, so nothing remains but to continue their journey and turn their backs forever on the past, but Maggie remains firm in her resolution; she is determined to return home and confess everything to Lucy and Philip and seek their forgiveness.

## BOOK SEVEN – THE FINAL RESCUE

Bob Jakin, fearing some accident on the water, pursues the couple downstream only to see them together in Mudport. He returns and tells Tom the news, and the certainty of disgrace for the family is more than he can bear after all the effort he has put into restoring their reputation and fortunes. When Maggie arrives at the mill, he is pacing beside the stream; she almost welcomes the censure that is sure to come as an echo of her own conscience. Tom's vehemence is even worse than she anticipates; he won't listen to her protestations that nothing had happened between her and Stephen and refuses to see her again, speak to her, or allow her under his roof. Their mother, hearing Tom's harsh words, gathers her things and determines to go with Maggie, but where are they to go? They are too ashamed to ask for help from one of Maggie's aunts. The only person Maggie can think of is her old friend Bob Jakin, who has always been so kind to her. Bob and his wife do indeed take Maggie and her mother in, eager to shelter old friends in need. Soon Bob visits Maggie and shows her his new daughter, whom he has named after her. As she holds the child, Bob asks in a circuitous fashion if Stephen had taken advantage of her, offering to beat him to a pulp if he had, but Maggie assures him that is not the case and asks Bob to bring the pastor to see her at his earliest convenience. He then offers to leave his beloved old dog Mumps with her to keep her company, and she gladly accepts this act of kindness.

Meanwhile, Maggie bears the brunt of all the local gossip. The women of St. Ogg's are certain the whole affair was her fault, even when Stephen writes from his refuge in the Netherlands explaining that all the blame was his. Philip in great confusion has gone into seclusion, and Lucy is so ill that she cannot speak to anyone. Maggie, determined to do something with her life, thinks to support herself by sewing as in years past and convince her mother to return to the mill to care for Tom, but first she seeks out Dr. Kenn, the pastor. When she tells him her story, which has already been confirmed by Stephen's letter, he believes her completely, but warns her that others will be less charitable and will impute evil to her despite evidence to the contrary. He advises her to go away as she originally intended, but she refuses, insisting that she must stay and convince Lucy of her genuine repentance. She then asks the priest if he can help her find some gainful employment.

Much to everyone's surprise, Mrs. Glegg is the one to leap to Maggie's defense. While all are condemning the unfortunate young woman, her aunt Glegg is steadfast in her conviction that the gossip circulating about her niece must be false, but even she is unable to convince Tom to forgive his sister. Meanwhile Lucy, having received Stephen's letter placing all the blame on himself, is beginning to recover, but no one knows anything about Philip's whereabouts. One day Maggie receives a letter in a hand she knows well. In it Philip shows that he understands her better than she understands herself, forgives her for her unintended betrayal, tells her that he came near suicide but did not want to add to her sorrow, and affirms his undying love for her.

Despite the best efforts of Dr. Kenn, the women of St. Ogg's persist in believing the worst of Maggie in the face of clear evidence to the contrary. As a result, Maggie is unable to find employment in the town. Finally Kenn, recently widowed, offers to hire her as governess to his own children. She gratefully accepts, but soon the town gossips begin to disparage even their pastor. More than anything else, however, Maggie longs to see Lucy in order to beg her forgiveness. Much to her surprise, Lucy appears in her room at the Jakin cottage one evening. They fall into a mutual embrace and are reconciled despite the agony both girls bear.

A few nights later, Maggie sits alone in her room with rain pounding on the roof. She had been dismissed by Dr. Kenn, who feared that her presence in his household was impeding his ability to minister to his flock and who had thus written to a friend in another town seeking employment for her. That very morning she had received a letter from Stephen begging her to let him come and take her away. This letter fills her mind as she stares out the window at the growing storm, now flooding the river to a dangerous degree. For a time she considers accepting Stephen's offer, but soon regains her strength of will and burns the letter. As she pours out her heart in prayer to God for strength, she feels water rising around her knees and feet; the threatened flood had arrived and was rapidly filling Bob Jakin's cottage. She quickly wakes Bob, and the two of them go out to secure the boats. Bob climbs into one boat and tries to rescue his family, while Maggie in the other is driven away by the current. Her only fear at this point is for her mother and Tom, perhaps in danger in the mill. As she rows with almost superhuman strength in the direction of the mill, all her bitter treatment at the hands of her brother evaporates from her mind, leaving only the undying love they had known since childhood. By the time she arrives the mill is gone, washed away by the flood, but the house remains, though water reaches to the upstairs windows. Tom is there, and assures her that their mother had two days earlier gone to visit friends in another town. He gets into the boat and the two begin to row away, heading toward town in the hope of helping others. Suddenly the reality of what is happening dawns on Tom, and his hatred of his sister melts away. As their boat is swept into the raging current, however, they are struck by floating pieces of wood torn from nearby buildings, capsizing the boat and plunging brother and sister to the bottom in an eternal embrace. After the flood waters subside, they are buried together under one tombstone, which reads, "In their death they were not divided." The grave is visited often by two men whose greatest joy lay there beneath the sod. Stephen in later years does marry Lucy, but Philip lives in solitude for the remainder of his days.

## **MAJOR CHARACTERS**

- Maggie Tulliver – The heroine of the story, she is a wild and strong-willed girl who rebels against the strictures of her rural life.

- Tom Tulliver – Maggie’s brother, he contrasts with her in every way imaginable, stubborn in clinging to ancient animosities and in his refusal to understand his sister’s longings and to forgive her shortcomings.
- Jeremy Tulliver – Tom and Maggie’s father, the proprietor of Dorlcote Mill, quarrels constantly with his neighbors, especially Lawyer Wakem, the richest man in the county. The quarrel leads to a heart attack and Tulliver’s eventual death, which drives much of the action of the plot because of the ongoing feud it produces.
- Bessy Tulliver – Tom and Maggie’s weak and helpless mother, she is unable to understand her daughter’s desire for more from life than the mill and its environs can provide.
- John Wakem – A lawyer and the richest man in the county, he represents Mr. Pivart, who owns the water rights without which Dorlcote Mill cannot turn a profit. His legal battles lead to the death of Tulliver.
- Philip Wakem – Lawyer Wakem’s hunchbacked son, he befriends and comes to love Maggie despite the animosity between their families.
- Jane Glegg – Bessy’s sister, she looks down on Bessy and her family because she is better off and thinks Bessy married beneath her.
- Sophy Pullet – Bessy’s hypochondriac sister, she is dominated by Mrs. Glegg.
- Susan Deane - Bessy’s sister, she is the kindest member of the clan.
- Mr. Deane – A successful manager at Guest and Company, he gives Tom his start in business.
- Lucy Deane – His daughter and Maggie’s cousin and best friend, she becomes engaged to Stephen Guest, who betrays her but later marries her after Maggie’s death.
- Rev. Walter Stelling – A young clergyman who agrees to tutor Tom and Philip.
- Bob Jakin – A boy from a poor family and a friend of Tom, he grows up to be a successful salesman and a man of integrity who loves Maggie despite her lack of interest in him and gives her shelter when no one else will have anything to do with her.
- Gritty Moss – Mr. Tulliver’s sister, a kindly but poor woman with eight children who owes her brother three hundred pounds but cannot repay it.
- Stephen Guest – The son of the richest businessman in St. Ogg’s, he is engaged to Lucy, but falls in love with Maggie and runs away with her.

## NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“It’s no mischief much while she’s a little ‘un, but an over-’cute woman’s no better nor a long-tailed sheep - she’ll fetch none the bigger price for that.” (Jeremy Tulliver, Book I, ch.2, p.17)

“Maggie, Maggie, where’s the use o’ my telling you to keep away from the water? You’ll tumble in and be drowned some day, an’ then you’ll be sorry you didn’t do as mother told you.” (Bessy Tulliver, Book I, ch.2, p.18)

“The need of being loved, the strongest need in poor Maggie’s nature, began to wrestle with her pride, and soon threw it.” (Book I, ch.5, p.44)

“Tom was only thirteen and had no decided views in grammar and arithmetic, regarding them for the most part as open questions, but he was particularly clear and positive on one point – namely, that he would punish everybody who deserved it: why, he wouldn’t have minded being punished himself if he deserved it; but, then, he never *did* deserve it.” (Book I, ch.5, p.45)

“If Tom had told his strongest feeling at that moment, he would have said, ‘I’d do just the same again.’ That was his usual mode of viewing his past actions, whereas Maggie was always wishing she had done something different.” (Book I, ch.6, p.60)

“They’re such children for the water, mine are; they’ll be brought in dead and drowned some day.” (Bessy Tulliver, Book I, ch.10, p.114)

“Mrs. Glegg had both a front and back parlour in her excellent house at St. Ogg’s, so that she had two points of view from which she could observe the weakness of her fellow beings and reinforce her thankfulness for her own exceptional strength of mind.” (Book I, ch.12, p.131)

“Incompetent gentlemen must live, and without private fortune it is difficult to see how they could live genteelly if they had nothing to do with education or government.” (Book II, ch.4, p.182)

“Maggie . . . was a creature full of eager, passionate longings for all that was beautiful and glad; thirsty for all knowledge; with an ear straining after dreamy music that died away and would not come near to her; with a blind, unconscious yearning for something that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life and give her soul a sense of home in it.” (Book III, ch.5, p.250)

“Write as your father, Edward Tulliver, took service under John Wakem, the man as had helped to ruin him, because I’d promised my wife to make her what amends I could for her trouble, and because I wanted to die in th’ old place where I was born and my father was born. Put that I’ the right words – you know how – and then write, as I don’t forgive Wakem, for all that; and for all I’ll serve him honest, I wish evil may befall him. Write that.” (Tulliver, Book III, ch.9, p.283)

“But these dead-tinted, hollow-eyed, angular skeletons of villages on the Rhone oppress me with the feeling that human life – very much of it – is a narrow, ugly, groveling existence which even calamity does not elevate, but rather tends to exhibit in all its bare vulgarity of conception.” (Book IV, ch.1, p.286)

“Observing these people narrowly, even when the iron hand of misfortune has shaken them from their unquestioning hold on the world, one sees little trace of religion, still less of a distinctively Christian creed. Their belief in the Unseen, so far as it manifests itself at all, seems to be rather of a pagan kind; their moral notions, though held with strong tenacity, seem to have no standard beyond hereditary custom.” (Book IV, ch.1, p.286-287)

“Some have an emphatic belief in alcohol and seek their *ekstasis* or outside standing-ground in gin, but the rest require something that good society calls ‘enthusiasm,’ something that will present motives in an entire absence of high prizes, something that will give patience and feed human love when the limbs ache with weariness and human looks are hard upon us – something, clearly, that lies outside personal desires, that includes resignation for ourselves and active love for what is not ourselves.” (Book IV, ch.3, p.307-308)

“It is not right to sacrifice everything to other people’s unreasonable feelings. I would give up a great deal for *my* father, but I would not give up a friendship or – or an attachment of any sort in obedience to any wish of his that I didn’t recognize as right.” (Philip, Book V, ch.1, p.316)

“Our life is determined for us – and it makes the mind very free when we give up wishing and only think of bearing what is laid upon us and doing what is given us to do.” (Maggie, Book V, ch.1, p.317)

“You have no pity; you have no sense of your own imperfection and your own sins. It is a sin to be hard; it is not fitting for a mortal, for a Christian. You are nothing but a Pharisee. You thank God for nothing but your own virtues; you think they are great enough to win you everything else. You have not even a vision of feelings by the side of which your shining virtues are mere darkness!” (Maggie, Book V, ch.5, p.364)

“Tom, forgive me – let us always love each other.” (Maggie, Book V, ch.7, p.377)

“Maggie’s destiny, then, is at present hidden, and we must wait for it to reveal itself like the course of an unmapped river; we only know that the river is full and rapid, and that for all rivers there is the same final home.” (Book VI, ch.6, p.420)

“It is unnatural, it is horrible. Maggie, if you loved me as I love you, we should throw everything else to the winds for the sake of belonging to each other. We should break all these mistaken ties that were made in blindness, and determine to marry each other.” (Stephen, Book VI, ch.11, p.469-470)

“I couldn’t live in peace if I put the shadow of a willful sin between myself and God.”  
(Maggie, Book VI, ch.14, p.500)

“We can’t choose happiness either for ourselves or for another; we can’t tell where that will lie. We can only choose whether we will indulge ourselves in the present moment or whether we will renounce that for the sake of obeying the divine voice within us, for the sake of being true to all the motives that sanctify our lives. I know this belief is hard; it has slipped away from me again and again; but I have felt that if I let it go forever, I should have no light through the darkness of this life.” (Maggie, Book VI, ch.14, p.501)

“I will bear it, and bear it till death. . . . But how long it will be before death comes! I am so young, so healthy. How shall I have the patience and strength? Am I to struggle and fall and repent again? Has life other trials as hard for me still?” (Maggie, Book VII, ch.5, p.540)

## ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Rev. Stelling, the schoolmaster in George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*, is used by the author to satirize the English educational system. What are her chief complaints, and how does she bring them out, not only in her portrayal of the schoolmaster, but also in the educational methods he uses? Consider also the goals and results of the kind of education portrayed in the novel. Be sure to support your assessment with specific details, both events and descriptions.
2. Victorian novels often satirized the English educational system. One such novel is George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*, where the schoolmaster Rev. Stelling is held up to ridicule. Compare and contrast Eliot’s criticism with that of Charles Dickens. You may choose any appropriate Dickens schoolmaster; possibilities include Mr. Squeers in *Nicholas Nickleby*, Mr. Creakle in *David Copperfield*, or Bradley Headstone in *Our Mutual Friend*.
3. Mary Anne Evans, the author who used George Eliot as a pen name, was raised in an evangelical Christian family, but rejected the faith with which she grew up, and all organized religion with it. How is her rejection of evangelicalism evident in *The Mill on the Floss*? Use incidents, characters, and quotations from the novel to illustrate her bitterness against the faith of her youth. Why do you think she had come to despise the faith in which she had been raised?
4. Mary Anne Evans, the author who used George Eliot as a pen name, was raised in an evangelical Christian family, but rejected the faith with which she grew up, and all organized religion with it. Compare and contrast the attitudes toward evangelicalism evident in *The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner*. Use incidents, characters, and quotations from both novels to illustrate why she came to despise the faith in which she had been raised.



5. Mary Anne Evans, the author who used George Eliot as a pen name, was raised in an evangelical Christian family, but rejected the faith with which she grew up, and all organized religion with it. Compare and contrast the attitudes toward evangelicalism evident in *The Mill on the Floss* and *Middlemarch*. Use incidents, characters, and quotations from both novels to illustrate why she came to despise the faith in which she had been raised.
6. Critic Morton Berman described George Eliot's approach to fiction by insisting that "art has a moral mission; it widens men's sympathies by . . . revealing a world in which the tidy line between vice and virtue - believed by some to be a safeguard of morality - cannot be drawn." In what way does *The Mill on the Floss* fulfill Berman's description? Evaluate Eliot's approach to morality from a biblical perspective, using characters, events, and quotations from the novel to support your assessment.
7. George Eliot once described her approach to writing by saying, "the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings, is that those who read them should be better able to *imagine* and to *feel* the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures." In what way does *The Mill on the Floss* fulfill the author's ardent desire? Is the desire a worthy one? Why or why not? Be sure to incorporate biblical principles into your assessment.
8. George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* is in many ways an autobiographical novel. From what you know of the author's life, what biographical elements does the novel contain? Be sure to give attention to ideas and character as well as events in your analysis.
9. Discuss the symbolic significance of the river in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. What does it represent, and how does it contribute, not only to the plot, but also to the reader's understanding of characters, events, and ideas? Be specific.
10. Discuss the symbolic significance of the flood at the end of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. What does it represent, and how does it contribute, not only to the plot, but also to the reader's understanding of characters, events, and ideas? Be specific.
11. Discuss the symbolic significance of Maggie's hair in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. What does it represent, and how does it contribute, not only to the plot, but also to the reader's understanding of characters, events, and ideas? Be specific.
12. Discuss the symbolic significance of Maggie's eyes in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. What does it represent, and how does it contribute, not only to the plot, but also to the reader's understanding of characters, events, and ideas? Be specific.
13. Is George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* a tragedy? If so, is Maggie a tragic heroine? What qualities does she possess that suit her for such a role? What do you consider to be her tragic flaw? If you do not believe that she qualifies, explain why not.

14. Do you consider the ending of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* happy or sad? Discuss not only the flood that causes the deaths of Maggie and her brother, but also the relationships among Maggie and other characters that precede the final scene. Be sure, as well, to consider the final sentence of the Conclusion in your evaluation.
15. George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* is a coming-of-age novel. Describe the growth and change that occur in the protagonist between the beginning and the end. Include moral growth, self-understanding, reactions to those around her in your assessment.
16. Evaluate the relationship between Maggie and Stephen Guest in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. Do you find it credible? If so, why? If not, why not? Be sure to use details from the novel to support your assessment.
17. In George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie Tulliver and Lucy Deane are foils. What qualities make them suitable foils for one another? How do these qualities help to bring out the salient characteristics of the protagonist and place her in bolder relief?
18. In George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, best friends Philip Wakem and Stephen Guest are foils. What qualities make them suitable foils for one another? How do these qualities contribute to the themes of the novel and to the reader's understanding of Maggie?
19. Discuss the role of family in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. Consider not only the relationship between Tom and Maggie, but also between Maggie, her parents, and the members of her extended family. Be sure to use specifics from the novel to support your ideas.
20. Many critics have argued that the structure of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* is unbalanced - that she devoted too much time to Maggie's childhood before abruptly jumping into the romance with Stephen Guest, then quickly tacking the tragedy of the flood on the end. Do you agree with this criticism? Why or why not? Use details from the novel to support your evaluation.
21. George Eliot is hardly a fatalist, yet her characters are often faced with situations not of their own making. Consider the plot of *The Mill on the Floss*. Is it driven more by character or by circumstance? Choose one of the two and use details from the novel to argue the case that it predominates over the other in the mind of the author.
22. George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* is often considered her most autobiographical novel. In particular, the author had a very close relationship with her estate-manager father and her older brother, who rejected her after she ran away with a married man. Discuss the extent to which these autobiographical elements of the novel reveal the author's ability to dig deeply into the emotions of her heroine. How do the descriptions of Maggie's inner struggles show that the author is speaking from her own experience? Be specific.

23. Near the beginning of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie's mother says to her, "Maggie, Maggie, where's the use o' my telling you to keep away from the water? You'll tumble in and be drowned some day, an' then you'll be sorry you didn't do as mother told you." This is one of many examples of the author's use of foreshadowing. Choose three *other* examples and discuss how they hint at events that occur later in the story. For what purpose might the author utilize this technique? How does it help to bring out thematic material in the novel?
24. In Book I, chapter 5 of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, the narrator describes the protagonist in these words: "The need of being loved, the strongest need in poor Maggie's nature, began to wrestle with her pride, and soon threw it." Maggie's struggle between love and pride goes on throughout the novel. Which, in your opinion, finally wins out? Support your conclusion with specifics from the book.
25. In George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, the author in many ways communicates disapproval of people with strong, fixed moral standards. Choose three characters in the novel that demonstrate this dislike and show how Eliot caricatures absolute morality and portrays it as unhealthy and harmful to those who hold such values as well as to those around them.
26. One of the issues that appears repeatedly in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* is that of forgiveness and what happens when it is granted or when it is denied. Choose three examples of relationships where forgiveness or the lack thereof plays a pivotal role. Does the author take a view of the subject that is compatible with Scripture? Why or why not?
27. In Book IV, chapter 1 of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, the author describes French villages thusly: "But these dead-tinted, hollow-eyed, angular skeletons of villages on the Rhone oppress me with the feeling that human life – very much of it – is a narrow, ugly, groveling existence which even calamity does not elevate, but rather tends to exhibit in all its bare vulgarity of conception." Eliot is often recognized as a leading realist, but does this quotation lead you to conclude that she was a pessimist as well? Use details from the novel to assess the author's view of human nature.
28. In Book VI, chapter 14 of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie rejects Stephen Guest's offer of marriage by saying, "I couldn't live in peace if I put the shadow of a willful sin between myself and God." The language is strikingly similar to that used by the protagonist in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* when she rejects Rochester's offer to live in a bigamous relationship: "Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour; stringent are they; inviolate they shall be. If at my individual convenience I might break them, what would be their worth?" Compare and contrast the moral systems of the two protagonists that lead them to these similar stands, being sure to cite details from both novels.

29. In Book VI, chapter 14 of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie rejects Stephen Guest's offer of marriage by saying, "I couldn't live in peace if I put the shadow of a willful sin between myself and God." The language is strikingly similar to that used by Julia in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* when she rejects Charles' proposal of marriage: "I saw today there was one thing unforgivable - like things in the schoolroom, so bad they are unpunishable, that only Mummy could deal with - the bad thing I was on the point of doing, that I'm not quite bad enough to do; to set up a rival good to God's." Compare and contrast the moral systems of the two characters that lead them to these similar stands, being sure to cite details from both novels.
30. Discuss the idea of renunciation and the role it plays in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. Why is Maggie so obsessed with the subject? How is it viewed by the author? Is Maggie's view of renunciation similar to or different from Jesus' teachings about losing one's life in order to gain it and taking up one's cross?
31. Throughout George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, the two families from which Tom and Maggie spring are contrasted with one another. What are the leading qualities that distinguish the Dodsons from the Tullivers? How do these qualities influence Tom, Maggie, and especially their relationship with one another? How does the author feel about the sets of qualities associated with each family? Of what does she approve or disapprove, and why? Support your analysis with specifics from the novel.
32. George Eliot, the author of *The Mill on the Floss*, was a feminist before the term became popular. In what way does the novel illustrate her advocacy of women? Consider in particular the extent to which Maggie Tulliver's plight and treatment by others are influenced by the fact that she is female.
33. Compare and contrast the elopements of Maggie and Stephen Guest in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* and Lydia and Wickham in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. In doing so, consider not only the outcomes for the people involved but also the consequences for the respective families and the societal responses to the behavior of the couples.
34. In George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie Tulliver is portrayed as one who deeply cares about the feelings of others and is willing to renounce her own in order to accommodate them. Other characters, however, are largely egocentric, caring only for themselves with little thought for others. Choose three characters in the book who are marked by self-centeredness and discuss how this trait affects Maggie as well as influencing the plot and highlighting the themes of the novel.
35. Near the beginning of Book I, chapter 12 of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, the narrator tells the legend of St. Ogg. Why is this story included in the novel? What is its symbolic significance in the story? To what extent does it represent an example of foreshadowing by the author?

36. The epigraph at the end of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* is a quotation from II Samuel 1:23, part of David's lament following the deaths of Saul and Jonathan in battle against the Philistines. Why do you think Eliot chose to make this sentence the epigraph to her story? What relationships can you see between Saul and Jonathan on the one hand and Tom and Maggie Tulliver on the other?
37. Does George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* have a villain? If so, which character would you choose and why? If not, what does that tell you about the author and her intentions in constructing the story?
38. George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* sets up a contrast between true religion, which is pictured as sympathy and fellow-feeling with all other human beings, and hypocrisy, which is portrayed as adherence to a narrow set of moral strictures. Evaluate this contrast from the standpoint of Scripture, being sure in the process to incorporate into your analysis characters who illustrate both models and incidents and quotations that bring out the author's moral and religious views.
39. George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* portrays true religion as sympathy and fellow-feeling with all other human beings. For the author, this feeling *was* true religion, and needed no creed or moral standard beyond the feeling itself. Does the author demonstrate the kind of fellow-feeling she advocates in her treatment of her own characters? Why or why not? Choose three characters from the novel and use them to illustrate your conclusion.
40. In George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, do the self-denial and self-sacrifice of Maggie Tulliver make her a Christ figure? Why or why not? Be sure to answer the question from the perspective of the author as well as from a biblical point of view.
41. In George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie Tulliver reads Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*. The choice was surely no accident. Compare the basic themes of Johnson's novel with the attitude toward life reflected by Maggie at that stage of her life. To what extent do these same themes infuse the whole of Eliot's novel? Cite incidents and quotations from both books in your analysis.
42. The main female characters drown at the end of Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* and George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*. Compare and contrast Eustacia Vye and Maggie Tulliver with regard to their personalities, their dreams, and the reasons for their ultimate ends.