

Discussion Questions for *Ethan Frome*

1. How does Wharton's description of the New England countryside add to the sense of oppression and loneliness that permeate the novel?
2. Why does Ethan Frome feel trapped? Does he contribute to this feeling, or is he a victim of his upbringing and environment?
3. Are Zenobia's illnesses real, or are they designed to allow her to get her way?
4. At the end of the novel, both Mattie and Zenobia are reduced to a state of paralysis; one real, one psychic. How does this affect Ethan Frome, and why does Mrs. Hale say that "But sometimes the two of them (Zenobia and Mattie) get going at each other, and then Ethan's face'd break your heart. . . When I see that, I think it's *him* that suffers most..."?
5. Should Ethan respond in a romantic way to Mattie; does his response to Mattie affect Zeena's treatment of him and Mattie?
6. Why does Ethan try to prevent the sled from hitting the elm at the last second? Does Ethan believe that he can escape his fate by the "accident"?