

**Joseph Luzzi • *The Middlemarch* Seminar • Class 2**  
**Virtual Book Club • February 15th, 2023 • Study Guide\* • © Joseph Luzzi**

*Please note: the below are only intended to help you “get inside” Eliot’s extremely complex, intricate work—please do not feel compelled to answer them in full, unless you wish to, and if there are questions or elements that you don’t understand, no worries, we will explain all when we meet for our upcoming seminar!*

1. Now that we have discussed *Middlemarch* in Session 1, what did you learn about Eliot and her fictional world that you did not know prior to our meeting? How has this new knowledge informed your understanding of her text?
2. What are three keywords in *Middlemarch*, and why?
3. How would you relate the work of Eliot to that of other major women authors like Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, and Virginia Woolf? How is she similar to these writers—and how is she different?
4. Why do you think Eliot chose to focus on multiple narratives in the novel (the marriages of Dorothea/Casaubon and Lydgate/Rosamond, the burgeoning affection of Dorothea/Ladislaw, Bulstrode’s “backstory,” etc.) rather than on ONE main narrative? What is the effect of what we might call this purposeful “narrative dispersion”?
5. In chapter 29 of *Middlemarch* we read:

*It is an uneasy lot at best, to be what we call highly taught and yet not to enjoy: to be present at this great spectacle of life and never to be liberated from a small hungry shivering self—never to be fully possessed by the glory we behold, never to have our consciousness rapturously transformed into the vividness of a thought, the ardor of a passion, the energy of an action, but always to be scholarly and uninspired, ambitious and timid, scrupulous and dim-sighted.*

What is the meaning of this passage? How does it tie into related issues and themes in the text?

6. Dorothea is, of course, more the focus of the novel than her sister, Celia; but what role does Celia play in the novel? What qualities and characteristics does she—and her marriage to Sir James Chettam—represent?
7. Much of the middle sections of *Middlemarch* deal with political issues. What are those public matters, and how does Eliot relate them to the more personal and intimate concerns of her book?
8. Much is made of Eliot’s capacity for subtle psychological insights; how do you see these at work in the novel? Can you please give an example?
9. Eliot personally had a complicated relation to religion and Christianity; how do such spiritual concerns appear in *Middlemarch* and drive the narrative?
10. Why do you think that *Middlemarch* remains a coveted classical work now, some 150 years after its publication? What is its single most important element that helps us make sense of our world today?

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