

Joseph Luzzi • *The Middlemarch Seminar* • Class 3
Virtual Book Club • February 22nd, 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. Of all Eliot’s strengths as a writer, which one has impressed you the most, and why?
2. Are you finding any difficulties in reading *Middlemarch*? If so, what are they and why?
3. In the final stretch of *Middlemarch*, the story of Bulstrode takes on increasing weight; why do you think that Eliot waited to develop his narrative? What are the main issues at stake in his tale?
4. Is the Dorothea that we encounter at the end of the novel consistent with the one that we met at the beginning? How has her character developed over the course of the book? How has it remained the same?
5. In chapter 74 of *Middlemarch* we read:

In Middlemarch a wife could not long remain ignorant that the town held a bad opinion of her husband. No feminine intimate might carry her friendship so far as to make a plain statement to the wife of the unpleasant fact known or believed about her husband; but when a woman with her thoughts much at leisure got them suddenly employed on something grievously disadvantageous to her neighbors, various moral impulses were called into play which tended to stimulate utterance. Candor was one. To be candid, in Middlemarch phraseology, meant, to use an early opportunity of letting your friends know that you did not take a cheerful view of their capacity, their conduct, or their position; and a robust candor never waited to be asked for its opinion.

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

6. What is the function of the literary epigraphs that Eliot places at the beginning of each chapter in *Middlemarch*? How are they intended to “guide” the reader? What other roles might they play, and what do they reveal about Eliot as both author and, more broadly, thinker?
7. Fred Vincy and Mary Garth begin to take up an increasing amount of narrative space in the latter stretches of the novel. Why do you think that Eliot chose to focus on them? What main issues do they—and by extension, their relationship—represent?
8. The character of Lydgate has been a focus of *Middlemarch* from the beginning. What does his “arc” over the course of the book—especially at the conclusion—reveal or suggest about the novel’s treatment of all that he represents (e.g., science, progress, skepticism toward religion, etc.)?
9. Toward the very end of *Middlemarch* we read:

But we insignificant people with our daily words and acts are preparing the lives of many Dorotheas, some of which may present a far sadder sacrifice than that of the Dorothea whose story we know.

What do you think is the particular meaning of these words, and why are they significant?

10. Now that you have completed *Middlemarch*, which aspect of it will most remain with you, and why?

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