

Honors American Literature
Dr. Van Gunten
**Questions for Edgar Lee Masters's
*Spoon River Anthology***

(All page numbers refer to the Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Classic edition). Answer each of the following questions in complete sentences on your own paper. If you do not type your answers, make sure they are neatly handwritten.

Imagine a graveyard in Spoon River, Illinois. It is a fictitious small town where everyone knows everyone. Many of the characters are actual portrayals of people Masters knew from his own hometown, Lewistown, Illinois, and from his grandparents' town, Petersburg, Illinois. For this "anthology," Masters created individual epitaphs for the townspeople.

Spoon River was a community that longed for perfection. The town officials and many of the townspeople wanted their town to be free of sin and full of faith and goodness. As a result, this conservative town became extremely judgmental, harsh, and conforming, which caused hostility and animosity in some of them.

"The Hill" (p. 9)

01. How do the first four stanzas provide small stories of some of the people buried on the hill?
02. How do all of these people buried on the hill serve as an introduction for the anthology?

"Minerva Jones" (p. 23)

03. Why is Minerva the object of ridicule and laughter while she is alive?
04. What happens between Minerva and Butch Weldy?
05. How does Minerva die?
06. Do you feel sympathy for Minerva Jones? Why or why not?

"'Butch' Weldy" (p. 26)

07. What is Weldy's occupation? How is he blinded?
08. What happens when Weldy goes to court? What does the judge's decision suggest about social class in Spoon River?
09. Do you feel sorry for Butch Weldy? Why or why not?

"Knowlt Hoheimer" (p. 26) and "Lydia Puckett" (p. 27)

10. How does Hoheimer feel when he is mortally wounded in battle?
11. What is ironic about the inscription on his tombstone?
12. What does Lydia Puckett say is the real reason Knowlt Hoheimer goes to war?
13. What do you think is meant by the last line of Lydia's epitaph ("Back of every soldier is a woman")?

"Margaret Fuller Slack" (p. 37)

14. Why does Margaret decide to marry the druggist?
15. Does Margaret write a novel? Why or why not?
16. How does Margaret die? Why does she call it "an ironical death"?
17. What does her warning ("Sex is the curse of life!") mean?

"Fiddler Jones" (p. 47)

18. What three examples are given in the epitaph of how different people can see life differently?
19. What does Jones give as an example of why some people might consider him a failure in life?
20. Is Jones satisfied with his life? Explain.
21. Read the last stanza of "The Hill" (p. 9) again. Does this description of Fiddler Jones support or

refute his attitude in his epigraph? How would you ultimately describe Fiddler Jones?

"George Gray" (p. 49)

22. Describe the carving on Gray's tombstone. What is the intended meaning of this picture? How is it particularly ironic?
23. What experiences does Gray claim that he missed in life, and why?
24. "I know that we must lift the sail / And catch the winds of destiny / Wherever they drive the boat." What advice is George Gray giving to people still living?

"Blind Jack" (p. 56)

25. What is Blind Jack's talent in life?
26. How does Blind Jack die? What part does Butch Weldy play in this?

"Petit, the Poet" (p. 64)

27. What metaphor is used here to describe life in the village?
28. In death, what does Petit, the Poet regret about his life? How is he like George Gray (p. 49)?

"Mrs. George Reece" (p. 66)

29. How has Mrs. Reece's life been affected by the Rhodes family? What do we learn about Thomas Rhodes's son?
30. What happens to Mrs. George Reece? What advice does she give?

"Amos Sibley" (p. 81)

31. What is Amos Sibley's profession?
32. What is Sibley's relationship with his wife?
33. Why does Sibley remain in his marriage, and how is this situation ironic?

"Carl Hamblin" (p. 89)

34. What is Carl Hamblin's occupation? What happens to him?
35. What is the phrase "Justice is blind" supposed to mean? Why does Hamblin think that the statue of Justice is blindfolded?
36. What is Hamblin's message by printing this article on the day the Anarchists are hanged?

"Lambert Hutchins" (p. 102)

37. What are the two "monuments" that Lambert Hutchins leaves behind after his death?
38. What provokes Hutchins to cast his vote for the railroad, and what are his personal reasons?
39. What does Hutchins receive for all his trouble?

"Hiram Scates" (p. 113)

40. What kind of election is Hiram Scates involved in? Who are the candidates?
41. What kind of people support each candidate? What is the result of the election?
42. What does Hiram Scates do after losing the election? Why is this significant?

"Richard Bone" (p. 124)

43. What is Richard Bone's occupation? When he first comes to Spoon River, what problem does Bone have in his work?
44. What happens after Bone has lived in Spoon River for a while?
45. How does Bone justify continuing his work? How does he feel about this practice?

"John Wasson" (p. 148)

46. What war is referred to in this epitaph? Under what circumstances does Wasson go off to war?
47. What difficulties does Wasson have after the war is over? What offer does he make at the end of his epitaph, and why?

"Lucinda Matlock" (p. 160)

48. How does Lucinda meet her husband? How long are they married?
49. What are the joys that she has known in life? What sorrow has she known?
50. What are the circumstances of Lucinda's death?
51. Who does Lucinda address at the end of her epitaph? What does she say?
52. What does Lucinda mean in the last line ("It takes life to love Life")?

"Samuel Gardner" (p. 160) and "Dow Krittr" (p. 167)

53. What is Samuel Gardner's occupation? Dow Krittr's?
54. What observation does Gardner make about trees and roots before and after his death?
55. How does Gardner relate this observation to life?
56. What does Dow Krittr say that he learns about trees and roots before he dies?
57. What might we infer has happened in Krittr's life to make him so bitter?

"Seth Compton" (p. 122)

58. To what does Seth Compton devote his life?
59. What happens after Compton's death? How is the event related to the question posed by the influential town members, "What is the use of knowing the evil in the world?"
60. Which books would be considered evil, and why? Which books would be considered good, and why?
61. How does Seth Compton's epitaph enforce stereotypes about small town America?

"Godwin James" (p. 150)

62. To what does Godwin James devote his life? How do we know?
63. How is James destroyed by life?
64. What does James say that he and Harry Wilmans have in common?
65. How would you describe James's attitude toward life? Toward Harry Wilmans? How is Godwin James's name ironic?