

***American Literature for
Christian Homeschoolers***

**Volume 4:
*The Magnificent Ambersons***

Answer Key to Review Questions

By Scott Clifton

Web: www.homeschoolpartners.net

Email: scott@homeschoolpartners.net

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Week 23, Day 1: Chapter I

1. Describe Major Amberson's background, accomplishments, and standing in the town of Midland.

Major Amberson built the town of Midland; he "made a fortune" in 1873. He is the most respected and probably wealthiest citizen in Midland.

2. What kind of town is Midland? What kind of town was it before?

It is a small town where everybody knows everybody. People admire the wealthy, including the Amberson family.

3. List some of the changes and vanishings that the author says that Midland (and Midland's residents) have undergone over the years. What kind of people populated the town?

Clothing, hairstyles, and home styles have changed over the years. The hired horsemen, stables, woodsheds, mule-drawn street-cars, parties, serenades, and plays have vanished. The people are descendants of hardy, thrifty pioneers who moved west. Their thriftiness contrasts greatly with the magnificence of the Ambersons.

4. Describe Amberson Mansion and the Amberson family in general.

Major Amberson buys 200 acres, then plots and builds streets, Amberson Mansion is a symbol of Amberson magnificence, and the pride of the town. The Ambersons set the cultural tone (eating olives, oil on their salad, drinking tea, keeping Saint Bernard dogs)

Chapter II

1. How does the author confirm the beauty of Isabel Amberson?

He remarks how Mrs. Foster can't keep her eye on the Hazel Kirke play because she's enthralled by Isabel Amberson's beauty.

2. Describe the two men Isabel thinks about marrying, who wins, and why.

Isabel is interested in two men (one with "sparkle," one with "persistence"). The first (with the sparkle) loses her when he steps through a bass viola (apparently drunk) when serenading her. Isabel then gets engaged to the second suitor (Wilbur Minafer).

3. What does Mrs. Foster predict about the Minafer family?

That Wilbur will make a good husband, but he and Isabel will have the worst, spoiled children ever, because she doesn't really love Wilbur, so she will love her children too much. She turns out to be correct, except for the fact that they only have one child.

4. What is George Minafer like? What do the townspeople long to see?

George is spoiled, a smart aleck, handsome, arrogant, dressed like a sissy, and he fascinates and disgusts the townspeople. The fight with the minister's nephew cements George's attitude toward other people, even adults, and his mother's lack of ability to discipline or chastise him. The townspeople long for the day when George gets his "comeuppance."

Week 23, Day 2: Chapter III

1. Describe George's experience at school. How do the teachers and students regard him? What does the author mean when he says George learns "nothing whatever about himself"?

George goes to a private school. His teachers are fascinated by him, but no one likes him because he is rude and pompous. He is smart and does well. He goes to a prep school and is thrown out for "insolence and profanity" toward the principal.

George learns "nothing whatever about himself," meaning that he still doesn't understand that he isn't the center of the universe.

2. What specific incidents in this chapter tell the reader the kind of young man George is growing up to be?

He comes back to town and drives a dog-cart dangerously fast around others, even whipping one of the men who works at a hardware store. FOTA (Friends of the Ace) is a private teenaged boys' club held at the somewhat run-down building of George's grandfather. The boys are eager to follow George since his grandfather owns the club's meeting place, and because of George's natural charisma, which he uses to take over the presidency.

Chapter IV

1. Describe the way George looks at the other people of Midland. How is he both similar to and different from his grandfather?

After his second year of college, George returns and is polite to the townspeople, but in a condescending way that people don't like. He is shown as similar to his grandfather (handsome), but different from him (arrogant instead of persuasive).

2. In what insensitive way does George see (a) his mother, and (b) the man he is introduced to at a party? What is this man like?

George, because of his selfishness and youth, can only view his mother (who is near 40) as a "mother," not someone with feelings and interests. He is disturbed at her loveliness and gracefulness. He is introduced at the party to a man he calls a "queer-looking duck" by his nieces, and then his mother introduces him too.

3. Give some characteristics of Miss Morgan.

She is friendly, beautiful, self-assured, and polite.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- George's Great Uncle John embarrasses him with his loudness, brash talking, and refusal to conform to social mores and dress. Of course, this is like George, who also refuses to conform to proper social behavior toward those he considers "inferior."
- Sydney and Amelia Amberson walk down the stairs as George takes Miss Morgan by. Sydney and Amelia are rich and regal, and George is proud of them. The couple represent the rich, noble Amberson family.

Week 23, Day 3: Chapter V

1. Describe Wilbur Minafer's looks and personality. Why do you think George doesn't introduce him to Miss Morgan?

Wilbur Minafer is plain-looking and undistinguished, and George doesn't even bother to introduce him to Miss Morgan (probably because he's not "an Amberson," and not worth George's time).

2. What is your take on how George treats Miss Morgan?

George and Miss Morgan dance, and George is strongly affected by her. When other young men try to dance, he becomes irritated and demanding, taking her away to talk with him alone (selfishly, like a toy he wants to keep from others).

3. Who is Fanny? What irritates George about how the "queer-looking duck" behaves toward his (George's) family? Explain the humor in George's being waved at.

George and Miss Morgan see the "queer-looking duck" dance with Fanny, George's 40-year-old aunt, who sometimes can look much younger or older than she is. He is a great dancer, but George is irritated that he seems too familiar with and not respectful enough of their aristocratic family, especially when the "duck" waves to them. The "duck," Miss Morgan informs George, wasn't waving at HIM—he was waving at HER, because it's her father!

4. Sum up the conversation George and Lucy Morgan have about what he is studying at college.

Lucy asks what he's studying at college—to learn a business or trade? George dismisses this, since he simply plans to be a gentleman and not have to work.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- Wilbur Minafer says goodnight to George, who barely answers (just like he barely answers people beneath him he's introduced to at the party).

Chapter VI

1. How does George insult the "queer-looking duck" in front of Lucy? What does this show about his character? How is he surprised?

George sees the "queer-looking duck" dancing with his mother and comments to Lucy. Lucy says that the "duck" gave her the flower she has; George acts jealous, calling him "an old widower." Lucy says that he is indeed, and that he's her father, embarrassing George.

2. What does Lucy tell George about her family? What does George say about her father's invention? How does Lucy take George's "compliment" of her father?

George backs off and underhandedly compliments Lucy's father, and Lucy comments that that's how arrogant people speak. She tells George that her father used to live here, but they moved, and he's invented a horseless carriage, which George says won't ever amount to anything (!).

3. What does George learn about Mr. Morgan from his Uncle George? Sum up the conversation between Eugene Morgan and Fred Kinney. How many times has Isabel been wrong, according to Fred?

George talks to his uncle George about Eugene Morgan, who Uncle says, used to be quite popular with young ladies, including young George's aunt Fanny, and....

Eugene Morgan runs into Fred Kinney, and he remarks mysteriously to Fred how his life changed drastically about 20 years before. Fred nods, understanding (the reader doesn't), and says his son Fred refused to come to George's party (because of being unseated as President of the boys' club). He also criticizes how Isabel "worships" her son George, which makes Eugene think deeply.

Eugene says that Isabel is "right" to love George, and that she's never wrong. Fred remarks that "She was wrong once."

Additional Chapter Notes:

- George reveals his arrogance and superiority with his conversation to Lucy Morgan. He dismisses her father and his "horseless carriage" invention as worthless.

Week 24, Day 1: Chapter VII

1. How has George's driving not changed since he was a boy? Explain how Major Amberson's horse and carriage compare to Eugene Morgan's automobile. What is happening to the Major's buildings and statues, as well as his horse and carriage?

George still drives recklessly, not caring very much for those who "get in his way." Major Amberson's horse are faster than Eugene Morgan's automobile, going 20 miles per hour at top speed as opposed to about 12 miles per hour for the automobile. The Major's horse and carriage, as well as his properties, are getting older and worn.

2. In what way does George accuse Lucy of acting toward him? How is this ironic?

He accuses her of acting "superior," when he himself is as arrogant as they come!

3. What are Eugene Morgan's memories of Midland, as Lucy tells George?

He says it was nicer, gentler, and more lovely, with sunshine and good air all the time.

4. Discuss the incident with the automobile and George's horses.

They almost run each other over, and George's cutter falls into a ditch.

Week 24, Day 2: Chapter VIII

1. How does George's mother annoy him? Why do you think he feels this way?

After the accident, George is dismayed to see his mother so happy talking to Eugene and his using her first name. He's probably jealous, or just doesn't think Eugene is good enough for their family to associate with on such friendly terms.

2. What does George believe Eugene Morgan is trying to do by cozying up to his family? How does his (George's) father react?

He says he believes Eugene Morgan is trying to cozy up to the Amberson family to get money for investing in his automobile. His father disagrees. George asks Fanny why Eugene Morgan is getting everyone so excited, and Fanny reproaches him, accusing George of making a fuss because he thinks Fanny is interested in marrying Mr. Morgan.

3. How are Eugene Morgan and George similar in how their personalities affect those around them?

They both attract attention and get people excited and sometimes upset.

4. What does George realize for the first time about Fanny?

He realizes for the first time in his life that Fanny is a passionate human with feelings and desires (he's apparently been too selfish to notice before).

Chapter IX

1. Describe George's treatment of Lucy at the dance. Why does he do this? What does his Uncle George do that George considers almost unforgivable?

George pretends to ignore Lucy, but secretly watches her and constantly hears her voice above all the others. Uncle George has paired up Fred Kinney with Lucy Morgan in a dance, which George considers unforgivable.

2. How does Lucy treat George at the dance? Why do you think this is? (Think back to their accident in the horse and carriage.)

Lucy offers George a dance, and George pretends not to be interested. Lucy pursues George for many dances, implying that she does so because he told her he liked her on their horse carriage ride. She probably is impressed that he attempted to save her from injury during the accident.

3. Sum up the conversation that Fanny and Isabel have as they watch Lucy and George dance. What other couple does Fanny closely watch? Why?

Fanny and Isabel watch the young couple; Isabel fawns over George, but Fanny is not impressed, telling Isabel that George's personality is not as amiable as Isabel thinks. Fanny closely watches Isabel as she dances with Eugene Morgan. She seems to be taken with Eugene Morgan.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- It's amazing how much goes on at a dance (an event that is supposed to be socially uplifting for a community) in the way of bickering, plotting, and gossip. Things haven't changed much in 100 years!

Week 24, Day 3: Chapter X

1. Why does Fanny send George the news clipping? What is he more interested in reading, and why? Which sentence does he read several times, and why?

Fanny sends George a newspaper clipping about spoiled young people. The writer offers his opinion that young men are too arrogant, condescending, spoiled, and rude, and that this does not bode well for America's future, especially when the young women and older people are captivated by this behavior. George disdains the clipping, but reads the letter with interest, in which Fanny says that Isabel gave Mr. Morgan a big party, that Mr. Morgan has moved to their town, that he is beginning an automobile plant, and that George's father is not in good health.

The sentence George reads several times is the one about Lucy's remarking that an actor she saw looked like George, but more "democratic in his manner," which annoys George.

2. Sum up George's letter to Lucy. How is his complaint to her undercut by his explanation to her?

George writes Lucy, telling her he doesn't understand her comment about his not being "democratic," when he explained to her his theory of life (basically that only a few people matter, and that he doesn't bother with most people because they are "shallow"). This is not exactly the type of thing to say to prove you are even-handed in your treatment of your fellow man.

3. Explain the conflicts that George has with two different persons regarding the Amberson Hotel. What does Eugene Morgan tell Lucy about “arrogant, domineering people”? Is this in your experience true?

First, George argues with his grandfather about the need to renovate the Amberson Hotel, but his grandfather argues back and locks George out of his office. Second, George visits the Morgans, and is angry at Fred Kinney when Fred pokes fun at the bad shape of the Amberson Hotel. When George stomps out, Eugene Morgan laughs uncontrollably, since it reminds him of what he and his friends used to do.

Mr. Morgan remarks to Lucy that “Arrogant and domineering people can’t stand the least, lightest, faintest breath of criticism. It just kills them.”

4. What do Lucy and Eugene Morgan discuss about Isabel Minafer? What does Fanny tell Lucy about Isabel and George, and about Wilbur Minafer?

Lucy asks her father how Isabel came to marry Mr. Minafer, and Eugene defends Minafer. Lucy says that Fanny told her that everything Isabel and George have to spend on their own comes from Major Amberson, that Minafer doesn’t like to spend money—just save and invest it.

Chapter XI

1. What does Lucy learn from Major Amberson? How does this news strike George?

One night Major Amberson reveals to Lucy that it was her father, Eugene Morgan, who stepped through the bass fiddle while drunkenly serenading Isabel, and that Isabel soon married Wilbur Minafer afterwards. He says Eugene never touched alcohol once afterwards. George is appalled, and argues with Aunt Fanny about what he believes is her throwing herself at Eugene.

2. How does Eugene Morgan both regret *and* rejoice because of his misfortune years earlier?

Eugene says he missed a golden opportunity to marry the beautiful and personable Isabel Amberson, but he is thankful it happened, because he’d never have had Lucy.

3. Sum up what Isabel tells George in their conversation about (a) his happiness, and (b) Wilbur Minafer?

George talks with his mother, and she wants to know if he’s happy, telling him these happy, carefree days of youth end quickly. She sheds a tear, telling George that she is worried about Wilbur, who seems to be in worse health and worried about investments.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- The difference between George and Eugene is shown when Eugene delivers “a word fitly spoken” (Proverbs 25:11) about his regret in marrying Isabel. This contrasts markedly with George’s constant rudeness and arrogance, criticizing others around him for their supposed lack of suitability and competence.

Week 24, Day 4: Chapter XII

1. Why does Wilbur Minafer seem to be in such bad health? How does George react to this serious news about his father?

Minafer's health is getting worse, and the doctor says he should get away from work. George shows very little concern about his father, asking about Lucy instead.

2. Where have the Morgans moved? How is Eugene Morgan's automobile business doing? What does this contrast with?

The Morgans have moved to a house close to the green and gray house George and Lucy drove past and George mocked. Eugene's automobile business is booming, which contrasts with the rumors of what is happening with the Amberson fortune.

3. What shocking news does Fanny tell George? What does Lucy say when George confronts her about it?

Fanny tells George that Lucy is engaged to Fred Kinney; George is shocked. George confronts Lucy at her house and demands the truth. Lucy says she is not engaged to Fred, but refuses to be engaged to George. She claims it is because she is older than he, but refuses to comment when he asks if that's the only reason. George asks her to settle things the night before he leaves.

4. Why do you think that Lucy does not agree to be engaged to George?

Probably because, although she likes him, she does not approve of the way he treats people or his view that he is going to be a "gentleman," instead of working and producing something.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- The success that Eugene Morgan is having with his automobile business is significant in two areas. First, it provides a strong contrast between Wilbur Minafer's apparently poor business decisions, which are shaky enough to have badly affected his health. Second, because they demonstrate how wrong George was about Morgan's horseless carriage invention being a waste of time.
- George's lack of concern toward his father's health is disappointing, but not unexpected. He seems more interested in Lucy's whereabouts than his father's declining health (apparently because he doesn't see any benefits to his own personal life provided by his father, like Lucy).

Chapter XIII

1. What does George tease Fanny about?

He teases Fanny about a rumor that Eugene Morgan is engaged to a young girl, which upsets Fanny greatly.

2. Explain Isabel's news about Sydney and Amelia. What is Uncle George's reaction to their request? How does (the younger) George see the situation?

Isabel tells George that Amelia and Sydney have requested their inheritance (1/3) now, since Sydney did not get the diplomatic position he desired. Uncle George says the family fortune won't stand for this, and Sydney and Amelia won't speak to Isabel or him.

George imagines himself a wealthy man inheriting their Florence, Italy home someday, and is not worried, but thinks it over and decides to talk to his grandfather about it. He decides not to interrupt his grandfather, who is trying to calm an argument between Uncle George and Sydney.

3. What does Amelia accuse Isabel of doing? How does this sit with George? How does Uncle George explain it to young George?

George hears Amelia accusing his mother of siding with Uncle George simply because Uncle George is friends with Eugene Morgan, and that Isabel is pretending to chaperone Fanny for Eugene when it is Isabel who wants to be with Eugene.

George confronts his Uncle George to ask if this is true, and Uncle George laughs in disgust, saying Isabel is on his side because Amelia and Sydney are “pigs” and are trying to swindle him and Isabel. Uncle George says Fanny is going after Eugene and that George shouldn’t tease her at all about it. He says Fanny keeps Isabel around to make sure Eugene sees her a lot.

4. Sum up George’s conversation with Fanny about the situation. What does he decide the family should do?

He confronts Aunt Fanny, asking if the rumors are true. When Fanny denies it, he suggests they all stop seeing the Morgans for a while, to stop the rumors. Fanny cries, accusing George of hating her and wanting to see her unhappy. George feels bad and decides that the rumors aren’t true.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- George is worried about rumors again. (His first worry dealt with the rumor that Lucy was going to marry Fred Kinney.) Before he didn’t care what anyone thought, so this demonstrates a change in thinking with George, which mirrors the changes coming to the Ambersons.
- The great green lawn George looks out on is the only large lot left; the others have been divided up into what he thinks are small, ugly homes. This is another visual representation of the slowly changing fortune of the Amberson family.

Week 25, Day 1: Chapter XIV

1. What does Lucy say to George in her letter?

Lucy writes George, “almost” accepting his proposal, but saying she is taking the idea seriously, and that George might even forget her one day, seeing her obituary when he’s an old man and trying to remember who she was.

2. Where are George’s parents? Why?

His parents are in Asheville. Isabel says they had to almost force Wilbur to go on vacation for his health.

3. Describe how George reacts at first when he gets the news that his father has died. How does this differ from how he reacts at the funeral?

George receives a telegram telling him his father has died. He feels bad that he doesn’t feel as grieved as others think he does. He weeps at the funeral, aware that his father was there for him.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- This chapter contains ominous signs for the Ambersons’ future greatness and influence, including (a) the old age, feebleness, and death of Major Amberson; and (b) the Amberson monument, which has been overshadowed by other newer, nicer gravestones.
- George grows up in this chapter. Although he still looks down on others for not being established, rich families, he begins to regard the feelings of others like Aunt Fanny (even writing his mother to tell Fanny they will take care of her), and he also begins to appreciate what his father did for him during his life.

Chapter XV

1. What has happened to Uncle George and Fanny? Whose fault is it? Does this fact make clearer any earlier events?

George Amberson and Fanny are bankrupted by Wilbur’s business decisions. Fanny has \$900 per year in insurance, but will not cheer up, despite George’s efforts. Isabel and George take a two-week vacation, and she is proud to be with him.

2. Describe George’s college graduation day. What three things does Eugene say explain both the good and the bad about George?

Uncle George, Isabel, Lucy, and Eugene visit George on his graduation from college. Eugene and Uncle George talk about young George, and Eugene says all that’s good and bad about the young man can be explained in three things: he’s Isabel’s only child, he’s an Amberson, and he’s a boy.

3. What does the remark that it takes some time for the Ambersons to “come to be people” mean?

As Eugene and Uncle George watch George with Lucy, they remark on his superior attitude, saying that it takes time—and more than just time—for Ambersons to “come to be people.” This refers to their arrogance,

and their difficulty in looking at others as equals, and treating others with love and respect as fellow human beings.

4. What has George actually learned in college? What does one of his college classmates mean when he tells Lucy, “Really, don’t you think that *being* things is rather better than *doing* things?”

George has apparently not learned how to DO anything in college other than pass tests. What George’s college classmate means by “being” and not “doing” is that he and his “type” are inherently superior to others, and don’t have to do anything.

5. When George tells Lucy he’s going to be a “gentleman,” the author says, “Lucy gave the horizon a long look, but offered no comment.” Explain the double meaning of this statement.

Lucy looks away from George, and toward the horizon, to avoid his eyes. This is also a way of suggesting that she is looking at the future, and not happy about her prospects with George, since their ideas on “doing” and “being” are so different.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- The “doing” vs. “being” contrast is significant in *The Magnificent Ambersons*. The “being” notion is more of an “Old World” ideal common to royal or noble families, while the “doing” is a “pick-yourself-by-your-bootstraps” American ideal of self-reliance. Eugene Morgan is an example of someone who “does,” and George an example of someone who “is.” The author’s sympathies are apparent, as Eugene’s character is much more sympathetic than George’s. The fortunes of the two families are also taking drastic turns, with the Morgans moving up the ladder of success, and the Ambersons sliding down.

Week 25, Day 2: Chapter XVI

1. What things do George and Fanny talk about? Why is Fanny surprised when George says that Eugene has been with them? What comment does George make that upsets her?

George and Isabel arrive home. George thinks Fanny looks tired and old, and Isabel says it will take time for Fanny to recover. George and Fanny converse, alone, in the kitchen. Fanny is shocked when George says Eugene has been with them, and says it is odd that Isabel didn’t mention that Eugene was there. George tells Fanny Eugene is doing well, and calls him “YOUNG FELLOW”! This is a departure from George’s view of “older” people. George teases Fanny about the possibility of Eugene’s asking her to marry him, and she bursts into tears.

2. What are the strange noises and shapes that George sees across the street at his grandfather’s house? Why is this occurring, according to Uncle George?

George goes to bed and sees shapes and forms across the street at his grandfather’s house, thinking that men are working to fix pipes, and decides to check back in the morning. The next morning he discovers that five new houses are being built and runs across, upset. Uncle George tells him that the Major has to do this for money, and that the Major has already sold off some items for money.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- The “foundations” of the new houses being built might represent the upheaval that is occurring in Mid-

land, both with the town's reshaping and modernization, and with the changing role of the Ambersons.

Chapter XVII

1. Why does Major Amberson sidestep George's request for a horse? What suggestion does Isabel have? How does George react to her suggestion?

George asks his grandfather for money and a horse so he can gain skill in driving. The Major doesn't have the money, and gently hints to George, asking him to come back in the fall if he's still interested, and he'll try to make it happen.

Isabel asks George if he would like to drive one of Eugene's cars instead. George says no, stating he's too much of a gentleman to get dirty working on cars.

2. How do George, Fanny, and Isabel all react differently to their visit to Eugene's automobile plant? Why do Fanny and Isabel react the way they do?

George goes with Isabel, Fanny, and Uncle George to Eugene's plant, bored along with his Uncle, while Isabel is fascinated and Fanny bleak. George notices how happy his mother is, which he attributes to the restaurant Eugene takes them to, but Fanny makes a cryptic remark. Isabel says it's because she enjoys seeing the mechanics of the factory, but the real reason is probably because she enjoys being with Eugene.

3. Sum up George and Lucy's conversation about their possible marriage. What is Lucy's objection to George? What angers George about her objection?

They leave, and in his car, Eugene passes and leaves behind George and Lucy in their horse carriage. George tries to talk to Lucy about marriage, but she becomes sad, and asks George what he's going to do for a living. He says he's not going to work, but to be a gentleman, which doesn't satisfy Lucy. This angers George because he thinks Mr. Morgan is leading Lucy to disagree with George's lifestyle, though Lucy denies it.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- George calls his grandfather "queer" in a conversation with his mother; this is the same term he used for Eugene Morgan, when George mistakenly assessed Eugene's identity, his character, and his possibilities for success with the "horseless carriage." Translation: George is probably mistaken in his assessment as to what is going on with the Major, the Amberson family, and the (his) fortune.

Week 25, Day 3: Chapter XVIII

1. What has changed around the Minafer/Amberson homes?

The view of the Minafer/Amberson family has changed. The terrace doesn't open toward just the Major's house anymore, but several new houses. The sounds have changed, with many more automobiles going by (which spells success for Eugene).

2. What does Fanny and Isabel's conversation about Eugene reveal?

Fanny doesn't like when Isabel refers to the summer as "dying," so soon (actually almost a year) after Wilbur has died. There is some awkward conversation about Eugene between Isabel and Fanny, with Isabel apparently unaware that Fanny's emotions are strained, thinking that Isabel has designs on Eugene.

3. What two scenarios does George imagine that involve Lucy?

He imagines a conversation with Lucy in which Lucy begs his forgiveness and throws her father over for him. Then he imagines Lucy surrounded with beaux, whom he calls "riffraff."

4. How do we know that Lucy, home with her father, is troubled?

She loses while playing chess with her father, which usually doesn't happen.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- The physical view of the Minafer/Amberson homes represents the new "outlook" that the Ambersons face in Midland, with their declining fortune and the town passing them by. The same two homes that were highly praised at the novel's beginning are decaying, and looking even worse with the newer structures going up around them.
- In contrast to the Ambersons' falling, the sounds on main street by the Amberson homes—automobiles increasingly being heard—are indicators of Eugene Morgan's success and rise.

Week 25, Day 4: Chapter XIX

1. What does Lucy do that upsets George?

She avoids him.

2. Describe the conversation about automobiles between Major Amberson and Eugene. What is George's "contribution" to the conversation? How does Eugene handle his comment?

The Major quizzes Eugene about cars, saying that they'll be too many soon, but Eugene replies they'll just increase the number of roads to compensate. George interrupts, saying rudely that automobiles are a nuisance, and had no reason to be invented. Eugene graciously says George might be right.

3. Is George's comment surprising, or is it typical of George's character? Can you think of two main reasons why he despises automobiles?

(Answers will vary, but it is typical in some ways, but surprising in its total lack of propriety, especially around adults.) There are two main reasons for George's hatred of automobiles. First, they represent change, and George wants to hang on to the old Amberson name and prestige, rather than make way for someone who "does" things instead of simply "is" someone. Also, Eugene Morgan himself is connected with automobiles, and George dislikes him because he loves his mother, and George doesn't think Eugene is good enough for her.

4. How do Isabel, Fanny, and the Major react to George's statement to Eugene? Why do you think each one reacts in that particular way?

The Major chides George, but his mother says nothing, and Fanny congratulates him secretly after the others have left, saying it was the right thing to do. The Major is simply correcting lack of manners, Isabel wimps out of correcting her son, and Fanny feels anger toward Eugene since he doesn't reciprocate her romantic feelings.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- Eugene again graciously speaks in an awkward part of a conversation (like he did earlier in the novel when he says he is thankful he didn't marry Isabel, because he wouldn't have Lucy). This is an obvious contrast with George, who is uncouth and rude with his speech.
- Automobiles, Eugene says, will make both outward and inward changes in society. This is similar to what has happened to George's family fortune and way of thinking ("being" instead of "doing").
- It's amazing that George calls Eugene's automobiles a nuisance around town, since George himself was such a nuisance driving around his horse and buggy, almost running people over and cracking a whip at adults as well!

Chapter XX

1. How does George answer his mother when she asks him why he doesn't like Eugene?

George says he doesn't care for anyone whose ideals and lifestyle he despises. He assures Isabel he won't bother Eugene again, but Isabel seems especially distressed, and George rudely shuts her up and sends her out.

2. Why is Fanny constantly keeping her eye on George? What does George think she means by her answer?

Fanny scrutinizes George often in a way that makes him uncomfortable, until he protests, upon which Fanny tells him she's waiting to see when he will see what's going on around him (he doesn't understand what). George thinks she means Lucy's absence, when Fanny actually means that Isabel loves Eugene Morgan.

3. How are George's relations with Eugene and Lucy? How is this demonstrated at Lucy's homecoming party? How does George's driving come into question once again?

Eugene comes over often, seeing Isabel and Fanny; George avoids him. At Lucy's homecoming George acts awkwardly, embarrassing himself and infuriating himself against Lucy. He drives home, almost killing Fanny and another lady. He sees his mother and Eugene together talking seriously, and is so angry that he stomps off and disregards their greeting to him.

4. How does George again behave like a hypocrite in this chapter?

George is angered by others' not regarding his feelings, but he cares so little for others he almost wished he had run over Fanny!

Week 26, Day 1: Chapter XXI

1. Sum up what Fanny tells George. How does he react to her revelations?

Fanny tells George she saw him turn away from his mother and Eugene, and that he “did right.” She then informs George that people are “talking” about his mother and Eugene, that Isabel never loved anyone but Eugene, and that the two were engaged.

George is shocked. He wants to know who is gossiping, then remembers Mrs. Johnson was talking to Fanny and gets her to admit she was gossiping about them.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- Fanny tells George her piece out of jealousy. George seems shocked, but this seems a little strange, since George is not stupid. It might, however, result from the fact that George is often out of tune with the feelings of others, concentrating so much on his own.

Chapter XXII

1. What does George see as he marches out to confront Mrs. Johnson?

George goes out and sees the cracked, decaying, dry fountain with a statue of Neptune in front of Major Amberson’s square.

2. What happens in the conversation between George and Mrs. Johnson? How does Uncle George respond to George when he tells his uncle that he has gone to see her?

He marches to Mrs. Johnson’s house and demands what she has been telling of his mother. Mrs. Johnson turns him out, George goes to his uncle’s room, and Uncle George says, “Now you’ve done it!”

Additional Chapter Notes:

- The cracked, decaying statue of Neptune represents the decay of the Ambersons. George marches right past it, not focused on his own family’s true problems, but right over to Mrs. Johnson’s house. (It’s easy for George to pretend that his family’s issues are the fault of other, “less worthy” families.)

Week 26, Day 2: Chapter XXIII

1. What is George’s explanation about gossip, and about how George erred?

Uncle George tells George he goofed by confronting a gossip: “Submit to gossip and you kill it; fight it and you make it strong. People will forget almost any slander except one that’s been fought.” Uncle George tells George it would be a mistake to keep confronting people about the “gossip.”

2. What does Uncle George say about Eugene and Isabel?

That Eugene and Isabel should marry if they want to. George is shocked at this, and leaves the house.

3. How is George's reaction (exemplified by the chapter's last line) typical?

George wanders for an hour, thinking, and returns home, barely saying "good night" to his mother. He stays awake thinking. Typical George: When daylight comes, his thought is "This can't be happening to ME!"

Chapter XXIV

1. What two things does George do, using his late father's picture? What does this say about his (George's) character?

George pities himself by looking at a picture of his father until he weeps, saying, "Poor father! It's better you didn't know." He pays to have a photo of his father decorated and puts it on the table Isabel and Fanny sit at often.

2. How does Eugene's appearance contrast with the appearance of the Ambersons' properties and homes?

Eugene comes by for Isabel in his car, looking like a millionaire. This contrasts with the Ambersons, who are looking less and less rich.

3. What drastic action does George take? Name several reasons why he does.

George rudely tells Eugene at the door that he is never welcome there again, and Eugene walks away. Isabel waits a long time by the door for Eugene, while George smugly sits there watching her.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- George puts the picture of his late father so Isabel can see it, and—he hopes—forget about Eugene.
- Isabel Morgan looks very weak in this chapter. Even though she has babied George her whole life, it seems unlikely that she doesn't realize that George doesn't like her going around with Eugene Morgan.
- George's slamming the door in Eugene Morgan's face recalls Isabel's rather unfair rejection of Eugene 20 years earlier.

Week 26, Day 3: Chapter XXV

1. Give some examples that show that George is completely out of control, based on the way he has recently treated (a) Mrs. Johnson, (b) Eugene Morgan, and (c) Fanny.

George has (a) rudely confronted Mrs. Johnson, (b) rudely told Eugene Morgan never to come back, and (c) rudely tries to push past Fanny and interject himself into a conversation between George and Isabel.

These contrast with George's opinion of himself, because he seems himself as cultured, refined, worthy of respect for being "an Amberson."

2. For what two major reasons does Fanny tell George he should leave his mother alone?

Fanny admits she shouldn't have egged on George, and that Eugene never was interested in her. She also tells George to leave Isabel alone, because she suspects Isabel isn't well, with heart trouble, since she sees

the doctor often. George is struck by the sight of a stained glass window above himself and Fanny with three figures that represent love and purity and beauty. George bitterly sits down to think, but doesn't disturb his mother. Isabel comes behind him and says, "You mustn't be troubled, darling."

Chapter XXVI

1. Describe George's reaction when Isabel gives him Eugene's letter. Do you think it was wise of her to do that? If not, why do you think she did it?

Isabel tells George she hates to see him upset and hands him a letter from Eugene, which says he understands that George doesn't like him, but asks Isabel if she will live her life her way or George's way, and that she must defeat George's will, and not "strike down my life twice." George is furious with the letter.

2. Why does Isabel think George is angry? What is the irony in his telling his mother he is trying to protect her good name?

Isabel thinks he opposes Eugene because if he and Lucy get married it would be awkward marrying his stepsister, which is not true. The irony is George's telling Isabel he's trying to protect her good name is that George himself has been the cause of much reproach to the name "Amberson" in the town himself, by his words and actions toward others.

3. How does Isabel think that marrying Eugene would be (a) unfair to George, and (b) unfair to Eugene?

Isabel wonders if it would be fair to George, to upset him by marrying Eugene Morgan, and fair to Eugene himself, given her family's heart trouble, to allow him to marry her when she might have heart trouble and die young.

4. What does Isabel's note to George say? Is this the sign of a healthy or unhealthy relationship between mother and son?

George falls asleep heavily, and awakens with a note pinned on him from Isabel that says she won't marry Eugene because she can't bear to see George suffer (which she apologizes for). This is very odd, almost twisted actions of a mother toward her son, treating him as if he were a young boy whose feelings might get hurt if she took away his toy or something similar.

5. Earlier in *The Magnificent Ambersons*, George cares little for the opinions of others, but at this point in his life, he's almost obsessed with what others think and say about his family. What do you think is responsible for this change in outlook?

Now that he realizes they're getting poor, he cares too much about what others say about his family. Before his family's wealth could "cover" any criticisms he heard, and he thought so poorly of anyone else's opinions that he didn't care what they said. It's probably true that it bothers George that Eugene is now rich.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- George tells Isabel he's through with Lucy because she acted rude and "superior" toward him. This is not actually true, but even if it were, George is exactly what he accuses Lucy of being! Somehow it's acceptable for George to behave this way, but not for the nouveau rich!

Week 27, Day 1: Chapter XXVII

1. What are Lucy's strengths—and one weakness—as described at the beginning of this chapter? How does this compare with George's character?

Lucy is described as a confident, secure, independent, self-reliant young lady, and more than just a beauty—but she loves George (her weakness). This contrasts with George, who has nothing but a “name” and “money.”

2. How does George react when he sees Lucy on the street? What is her response to him? What does this tell George?

George sees Lucy and gets flustered as to what to do; he wants to be high-classed, but not insulted. Lucy greets him warmly, and George realizes she must not have heard what he said to Eugene.

3. Why does George scold Lucy? What is her response to him? What makes George so angry when he tells Lucy he and his mother are going away on a trip, possibly never to return?

George chides Lucy for not writing, but she says there was no point, since they are so different they would never get married. He tells her this is the last time he'll see her, since he and his mother are going on a long trip. Lucy seems cheerful and totally unaffected, which angers and upsets George. After he leaves, Lucy goes to the drugstore, not feeling well, and faints.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- Lucy's description as confident, secure, independent, and self-reliant seems on the surface to be like George, but it isn't—George's security depends upon the efforts of others (his family name, his family's wealth), and is an illusion. George is not truly independent, because he relies on these things too much.

Chapter XXVIII

1. What does Lucy burn? Why? What commendable act of George's does she still remember? How does her taking care of her father compare with George's “taking care” of his mother?

Lucy throws a number of photos and letters into the fire after hearing Fanny describe what George did to Eugene and lament that fact that Isabel has raised him to be so horrible. Lucy expresses her anger to Eugene, who agrees that George is horrible. But she thinks of George, and the time he tried to keep her from getting hurt in the cutter accident.

Lucy keeps her father upbeat and happy by dragging him to parties and dances, truly concerned for his happiness. This contrasts with George's selfishly “taking care” of his mother.

2. Describe the changes Midland is undergoing. How many years go by?

The town is growing greatly, not always in pretty ways. The older people are dying off, and newer ones taking their place, of different nationalities. People are generally optimistic and hardworking, vocal and desirous of progress and more factories. They build, but the buildings are dirty and not under control, and the people are too devoted to “prosperity,” and not enough to God.

The town gets dirtier, affecting Amberson Addition, which is run-down and shabby, along with the other nearby houses. The houses Major Amberson built go unrented, and he loses money. George and Isabel have been gone for three years.

3. What do Uncle George and Fanny decide to invest in? What is Eugene Morgan's advice about this idea?

Uncle George and Fanny discuss their money troubles and consider investing in electric lights for cars. Eugene cautions them about jumping in too quickly, but the two go all in.

4. What disturbing news about Isabel does Uncle George tell Eugene? Why are he and Lucy upset with George?

Uncle George visits Isabel and George, saying that Isabel wants to come home if her heart can stand the trip. They visit the Morgans' new home, and Uncle George jokes with Lucy about refusing Fred Kinney's repeated proposals. He tells Eugene that Isabel's heart needs rest at home, which worries Eugene, especially when it seems George won't let her come back. Lucy agrees.

Week 27, Day 2: Chapter XXIX

1. Sum up Isabel's condition and what happens upon her return.

Isabel's heart gets so bad that George has to let her return. She arrives home, and the Major tries to see her, looking very old and stooped. George apologizes for waiting so long to return, and Eugene comes to see Isabel. George refuses. Isabel asks to see Eugene, but dies that night before she can.

2. What do you think of George's decision not to let Eugene see his mother?

It is a selfish, bitter act designed to hurt Eugene Morgan.

3. How is it significant that Isabel has "heart trouble"? In what two major ways in her life has something been "wrong with her heart" (besides the actual medical condition that she dies from)?

Isabel's life has been negatively affected because of her "heart." Her heart has longed for Eugene since her husband's death, and her heart for her son has shown a love for him that in many respects is improper and has resulted in George's insufferable temperament.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- George's not letting Eugene Morgan see Isabel is almost, humanly speaking, unforgivable—unlike the minor annoyance that George considered "unforgivable" earlier in the story, when his Uncle George merely pairs up Lucy Morgan with Fred Kinney at a social dance. It's clear that George still looks at his own actions as unassailable, simply because of who he is, and regardless of the effects upon others.

Chapter XXX

1. How does Fanny answer George when he defends the way he has "protected" his mother? What does this say about the Amberson family? What good point does George make about who is to blame?

George defends to Fanny his decision to take his mother away. Fanny doesn't agree totally, because instead of being all concerned about the Ambersons, the town has moved on to new things and couldn't care less

about gossiping about Isabel. George admits Isabel asked to see Eugene, and says that Fanny and Uncle George were wrong not to stand up to him. He is right about that! They are partly to blame. George runs to his room, upset, and Fanny knows they were all wrong to bar Eugene from seeing Isabel.

2. Explain the situation with the electric automobile light investment.

Fanny thinks it's risky to have invested with Uncle George, because of his bad luck. The light turns out to be a shaky proposition, since it needs great speed to work on the car.

3. Sum up the situation of the deed to the house. What does this show about the decision-making abilities of the Major, Uncle George, and young George?

Uncle George also tries to settle Isabel's estate, but can't find the deed to her house. George tells him to forget it, but Uncle George asks the Major for it, but waits so long that the Major can't think coherently any more. The Major dies shortly afterwards. This reflects poorly on their decision-making capabilities.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- The deed situation and automobile light investment situation reflect the increasingly incoherent mess that the Ambersons have become. The town is literally and figuratively passing them by.

Chapter XXXI

1. How have things turned so drastically for the Ambersons, compared to the story's beginning? (Include how George is treated by other young people as he walks the streets.) Sum up Uncle George's conversation with George.

The Amberson estate is broke. George has nothing. Uncle George takes a position, and George gets \$600, plus \$8 per week working as a clerk. A car full of young people goes by George, and the young people mock him.

Uncle George speaks kindly to George as he leaves, saying he'll probably never see him again, mentioning a girl he wanted to marry many years ago, and telling George he was fond of him, but didn't like him and thought he should be hanged—but now he likes him for how he has stood up under pressure—and so does someone else (Lucy)!

2. What does George believe that his worst day on earth was? How does he spend his last night in the Amberson home?

George walks home, reminiscing about the places in town where he grew up, even his own house. Fanny has set up an apartment life for her and George, but he doesn't want to live there. He arrives home, feeling guilty and thinking that his worst day was when his mother had heard what he had said to Eugene. George spends the last night in his mother's room kneeling in prayer, asking his mother and God to forgive him.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- George is destitute in two ways. First, the Amberson fortune is gone. Second, he has been left without his mother, without Lucy, without a job, and without a place to stay.
- The irony in this chapter is that George now has to work—to “do” something instead of “be” something.

Week 27, Day 3: Chapter XXXII

1. Why does George tell Fanny he's not staying with her anymore? Why does Fanny panic?

George helps Fanny and tells her he's not staying with her because he couldn't pay his fair share. Fanny panics, begging him not to leave her, because it turns out she's lost ALL her money in the headlight invention.

2. Sum up the conversation George has with Frank Bronson. What kind of job does he need to find?

George tells Frank Bronson he can't be a lawyer because he needs more money now. Bronson says he feels responsible since he got Fanny into investing in auto headlights. George asks Bronson to help him find a dangerous, but high-paying, job, and Bronson agrees.

3. List at least two ways in this chapter that George shows courage and self-control.

George rallies Fanny; he shows his mettle and toughness in facing grim prospects. George also says he needs to make up for a few important things, and he risks danger to his health so he can help Fanny pay the bills.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- George's prayer has played a part in changing his attitude. He realizes the importance of "doing" instead of "being," and he seems to have long-term plans on righting wrongs in his life. (And he probably wishes he hadn't fooled around in school!)

Chapter XXXIII

1. Describe George's work. What do the other apartment renters in his building say about him? How does he react?

George works hard, suffering taunts of other renters as being "stuck-up" without saying anything.

2. What does George see on his walks through the town? What does this indicate to the reader?

He takes long walks through the dirty, gray town, noticing the Amberson buildings and homes are gone and replaced with other structures. Even "Amberson Boulevard" is renamed "Tenth Street." When he reads a book in the library about great citizens of Midland, the name "Amberson" is not listed among them.

3. What has George finally received that the citizens of Midland had hoped for years ago? What is ironic about his receiving it?

George has received his COMEUPPANCE! The irony is that those who wanted to see it happen didn't see it happen, because too much time went by, and the town became so large that the doings of the Ambersons became less important.

Week 27, Day 4: Chapter XXXIV

1. What has happened to Lucy's "Beautiful House"?

George sees Lucy's "Beautiful House" (white), which is painted dark, since the gray soot can't be kept away from staining it.

2. What has Lucy still *not* done? Explain her Indian story. What does she mean when she describes a tribe that hates their chief, but still "weren't able to discover any other warrior that they wanted to make chief in his place"?

George sees Eugene on the street, but they both avoid each other. Lucy visits Fanny 2-3 times per year, but neither mentions George. Lucy is busy, but still single.

Eugene says he'd be able to tolerate George, and could even build a house for him and Lucy close by, but Lucy doesn't like the idea, since it's too much like the Ambersons' setup. Lucy invents an Indian story for her father about a tribe that hates their chief, "but they weren't able to discover any other warrior that they wanted to make chief in his place," meaning Lucy is irritated at George, but can't forget him.

3. What does Fred Kinney tell Eugene? How does Eugene respond?

Eugene talks to Fred Kinney about George, and Fred tells him George is a nitroglycerin expert. He asks Eugene if he has a job for George, but Eugene says no, and Fred says George will be lucky to live much longer without an accident.

4. How is George hurt?

George is hit by a car while deep in thought and has his legs broken. He manages to call the driver "Riffraff!" before going to the hospital.

Additional Chapter Notes:

- The white house darkened by soot could be symbolic of George, who has had such "darkness" overtake his life, especially brought on by changes in technology (represented by the soot).
- George's being hit by a car is symbolic, again because he has always hated automobiles and what they represent to him: change, and Eugene Morgan.

Chapter XXXV

1. Why doesn't Eugene want to help George? How could he have helped George without wounding his pride?

Eugene still doesn't want to help George; he is too angry still about what happened with Isabel. George wouldn't take the job anyway, but Eugene thinks if he wanted he could have hired George through one of the other companies he secretly owned.

2. Describe George's thoughts in the hospital bed.

In the hospital bed George thinks of Eugene as the same as his grandfather—respected, well-known, and rich.

3. What touching coincidence happens to Eugene and Lucy? How do George and Eugene resolve their differences? Why does Eugene decide to help George in the future?

Eugene sees George's accident in the paper, but is still unmoved because George cost him and Isabel years of happiness. Eugene thinks fondly of Isabel, writes Lucy, and receives a letter from Lucy saying the same thing!

He goes from the train to see George at the hospital, and Lucy is already there, knowing he would come. George asks him to forgive him, and Eugene feels he has been true at last to Isabel by helping George.

Additional Chapter Notes:

The irony in Eugene's bitter behavior toward George comes from the fact that Eugene is angry at George for costing him years of happiness with Isabel, when now his (Eugene's) actions are causing his daughter Lucy years of happiness with George.