

# 9

## Lesson Nine

### FOCUS: Themes of the Novel

Themes are the central, recurring subjects of a novel. As characters grapple with circumstances such as racism, class, or unrequited love, profound questions will arise in the reader's mind about human life, social pressures, and societal expectations. Classic themes include intellectual freedom versus censorship, the relationship between one's personal moral code and larger political justice, and spiritual faith versus rational considerations. A novel often reconsiders these age-old debates by presenting them in new contexts or from new points of view.



### Discussion Activities and Writing Exercise



Use the following questions to stimulate discussion or provide writing exercises in order to interpret the novel in specific ways. Using textual references to support ideas, explore the following themes and others your students have identified:

#### **Betrayal**

Failed relationships, unreasonable expectations, and broken promises permeate the novel. During Dr. Sloper's visit to her home, poor Mrs. Montgomery betrays her own brother by saying, "Don't let her marry him!" Discuss the various ways the characters betray one another. Are all these betrayals intentional? Why or why not?

#### **Greed**

Catherine has an inheritance of \$10,000 a year from her mother. Dr. Sloper rightly supposes Morris will not marry her without the additional \$20,000 income from her father's fortune. Are there any clues in the novel that Catherine cares about money or the things it can buy her? Which character is the most concerned with money? Have students support their answers with passages from the text.

#### **Revenge**

Catherine ultimately controls the relationship with her father. By refusing to promise she will not marry Morris after her father's death, she breaks any remaining power he holds over her. "She knew herself that she was obstinate, and it gave her a certain joy" (p. 207). Why does she feel joy at finally defying her father? Does he get revenge by not leaving her as substantial an inheritance? Why or why not?



### Homework

Ask students to begin their essays using the topics in this guide, the discussion questions in the Reader's Guide, or others you might approve. Outlines are due during the next class period.