

Name: _____

Period: _____

Spoon River Anthology by Edgar Lee Masters

Spoon River Anthology is a mash-up of poetry, drama, and fiction. Masters presents a series of first-person monologues as they appear on the gravestones in a Midwestern cemetery in the early 1900s. The characters “speak” their own poetic epitaphs from beyond the grave, confessing the true motivations of their lives and uncovering many of the mysteries and secrets of the town. The following epitaphs appear in the introductory film. On the line under each epitaph, write the adjective pair that corresponds to the speaker’s tone and circle the textual evidence that indicates it.

Humble & Honored
Arrogant & Disappointed
Reflective & Melancholy
Proud & Grateful
Misunderstood & Sad
Professional & Secretive
Unrecognized & Patriotic
Regretful & Ignorant

* * * * *

Elsa Wertman

I was a peasant girl from Germany,
Blue-eyed, rosy, happy and strong.
And the first place I worked was at Thomas Greene's.
On a summer's day when she was away
He stole into the kitchen and took me
Right in his arms and kissed me on my throat,
I turning my head. Then neither of us
Seemed to know what happened.
And I cried for what would become of me.
And cried and cried as my secret began to show.
One day Mrs. Greene said she understood,
And would make no trouble for me,
And, being childless, would adopt it.
(He had given her a farm to be still.)
So she hid in the house and sent out rumors,
As if it were going to happen to her.
And all went well and the child was born --They were so kind to me.
Later I married Gus Wertman, and years passed.
But -- at political rallies when sitters-by thought I was crying
At the eloquence of Hamilton Greene --
That was not it.
No! I wanted to say:
That's my son!
That's my son!

Hamilton Green

I was the only child of Frances Harris of Virginia
And Thomas Greene of Kentucky,
Of valiant and honorable blood both.
To them I owe all that I became,
Judge, member of Congress, leader in the State.
From my mother I inherited
Vivacity, fancy, language;
From my father will, judgment, logic.
All honor to them
For what service I was to the people!

Richard Bone

When I first came to Spoon River
I did not know whether what they told me
Was true or false.
They would bring me an epitaph
And stand around the shop while I worked
And say "He was so kind," "He was wonderful,"
"She was the sweetest woman," "He was a consistent Christian."
And I chiseled for them whatever they wished,
All in ignorance of its truth.
But later, as I lived among the people here,
I knew how near to the life
Were the epitaphs that were ordered for them when they died.
But still I chiseled whatever they paid me to chisel
And made myself party to the false chronicles
Of the stones,
Even as the historian does who writes
Without knowing the truth,
Or because he is influenced to hide it.

Rutherford McDowell

They brought me ambrotypes
Of the old pioneers to enlarge.
And sometimes one sat for me
Some one who was in being --
When giant hands from the womb of the world
Tore the republic.
What was it in their eyes? --
For I could never fathom
That mystical pathos of drooped eyelids,
And the serene sorrow of their eyes.
It was like a pool of water,
Amid oak trees at the edge of a forest,
Where the leaves fall,
As you hear the crow of a cock
From a far-off farm house, seen near the hills
Where the third generation lives, and the strong men
And the strong women are gone and forgotten.
And these grand-children and great grand-children
Of the pioneers!
Truly did my camera record their faces, too,
With so much of the old strength gone,
And the old faith gone,
And the old mastery of life gone,
And the old courage gone,
Which labors and loves and suffers and sings
Under the sun!

Hortense Robbins

My name used to be in the papers daily
As having dined somewhere,
Or traveled somewhere,
Or rented a house in Paris,
Where I entertained the nobility.
I was forever eating or traveling,
Or taking the cure at Baden-Baden.
Now I am here to do honor
To Spoon River, here beside the family whence I sprang.
No one cares now where I dined,
Or lived, or whom I entertained,
Or how often I took the cure at Baden-Baden!

Anne Rutledge

Out of me unworthy and unknown
The vibrations of deathless music;
"With malice toward none, with charity for all."
Out of me the forgiveness of millions toward millions,
And the beneficent face of a nation
Shining with justice and truth.
I am Anne Rutledge who sleep beneath these weeds,
Beloved in life of Abraham Lincoln,
Wedded to him, not through union,
But through separation.
Bloom forever, O Republic,
From the dust of my bosom!

Hannah Armstrong

I wrote him a letter asking him for old times, sake
To discharge my sick boy from the army;
But maybe he couldn't read it.
Then I went to town and had James Garber,
Who wrote beautifully, write him a letter.
But maybe that was lost in the mails.
So I traveled all the way to Washington.
I was more than an hour finding the White House.
And when I found it they turned me away,
Hiding their smiles.
Then I thought: "Oh, well, he ain't the same as when I boarded him
And he and my husband worked together
And all of us called him Abe, there in Menard."
As a last attempt I turned to a guard and said:
"Please say it's old Aunt Hannah Armstrong
From Illinois, come to see him about her sick boy
In the army."
Well, just in a moment they let me in!
And when he saw me he broke in a laugh,
And dropped his business as president,
And wrote in his own hand Doug's discharge,
Talking the while of the early days,
And telling stories.

Knowlt Hoheimer

I was the first fruits of the battle of Missionary Ridge.
When I felt the bullet enter my heart
I wished I had staid at home and gone to jail
For stealing the hogs of Curl Trenary,
Instead of running away and joining the army.
Rather a thousand times the county jail
Than to lie under this marble figure with wings,
And this granite pedestal
Bearing the words, "Pro Patria."
What do they mean, anyway?

On the line under each epitaph, write the adjective pair that corresponds to the speaker's tone and circle the textual evidence that indicates it.

- Humble & Honored**
- Arrogant & Disappointed**
- Reflective & Melancholy**
- Proud & Grateful**
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Assignment

ON A SEPARATE PAPER, write a R.A.C.E. response to this question: **What is the difference between TONE and MOOD? Explain your answer using one of the epitaphs.**

Restate the question as part of your answer. [*The difference between tone and mood is....*] **Answer the question with a clear claim.** [*...tone is how the speaker of the text feels, but mood is how the text makes the reader feel.*] **Cite textual evidence, including the speaker's name and appropriate quotations from the epitaph.** [*In his epitaph, George Gray says, "I have studied many times...."*] **Explain how the textual evidence supports and illustrates your answer.** [*From this word choice, the reader can infer that George feels regretful because he did not take more risks in his life....*]

Your finished response should be one coherent paragraph that is at least ¾ of a page in length. Staple it to this page and turn it in.