

## Worksheet 2. Sherwood Anderson's Portrait of George Willard (teacher version)

The six stories that were assigned for reading in *Winesburg, Ohio* zero in on George and his relationship with his family and residents of the town. Use this worksheet to analyze the following six instances where these relationships are described. Be sure to use evidence from the text in your answers.

### “Mother”

1. How has Mrs. Willard's life changed over the years?

She had a colorful and flamboyant girlhood, but now in her forties, she is listless and frail, sapped of vitality.

2. Describe the relationship of mother and son.

Although they spend time together, theirs is not a comfortable and confiding relationship. She is fiercely protective, but also somewhat distant.

3. What does the simile comparing his mother to “a tigress whose cub has been threatened” suggest about the Willard family?

Between the parents there is a climate of animosity and resentment. Mrs. Willard still sees George as her baby, while in fact, he is a young man. George does not quarrel with his father, but rather quietly marshals his own thoughts, making his mother respond protectively.

4. What does George expect in his own future?

He will have to leave Winesburg, Ohio; however, he is not yet ready to fully understand or explain his thoughts. This story foreshadows the final story, “Departure”.

### “Nobody Knows”

5. What do George's thoughts and feelings as he approaches Louise Trunnion reveal about him?

His combination of nervousness and determination reflect his inexperience. He approaches her in secrecy, and he wants to keep their tryst secret.

6. Does the story show George in a positive or a negative light?

He has no real interest in Louise Trunnion, but merely wants to use her. While other stories show him as a curious and patient listener, here he merely wants to make use of a selfish opportunity.

### “An Awakening”

7. How is George's relationship with Belle Carpenter both similar to and different from his relationship with Louise Trunnion?

## **Lesson 2. George Willard's Development**

In contrast to the secretive approach he has with Louise, this relationship is publicly visible as George and Belle walk about together. Still, on both sides, the “courtship” is based more on usefulness than on affection.

8. In the story, George has two apparent awakenings. Describe the first one.

Walking alone at night, he has a sudden glorious sense of being powerful and manly, no longer a callow boy.

9. What happens in the interaction between George and Ed Handby?

There is not really a fight; despite George’s efforts, Handby just tosses him aside with ease.

10. Describe George’s second awakening. Is it more or less authentic than the first one?

George feels humiliated and angry about his powerlessness in the confrontation with the other man: a marked contrast to his earlier awareness. Both awakenings are part of the truth of what kind of man George is, and, with further maturity, what kind of man he can become.

### **“Death”**

11. The story “Death” serves as a complement to the earlier story, “Mother”. What more does it reveal about Mrs. Willard?

There is something deeply lovable and vital in George’s mother that has been suppressed by her dead-end marriage to her husband. In the end, Mrs. Willard welcomes death, which she personifies as a lover. The secret of the money given to her by her father dies with her, hidden uselessly behind a wall.

12. How does George respond to her death?

He feels some annoyance, as it disrupts his plans. It takes a while for realization to sink in, and then he grieves, but in a very inarticulate way.

### **“Sophistication”**

13. What does the story stress about both George and Helen?

Both young people are on in a transitional period—on the cusp between youth and maturity. Both struggle with feelings of loneliness and a tension brought about by their growing awareness that life is both meaningful and meaningless. They respect and derive comfort from each other.

14. Is this a love story? Why, or why not?

The story contains hints of mature love between a man and a woman. It displays George in a different light than the immature young man who engaged with the characters, Louise Trunion and Belle Carpenter in the earlier stories. Yet, in “Sophistication,” there is no certainty about whether George and Helen will grow toward each other or move on with their lives with only vague memories of each other.

### **“Departure”**

**Lesson 2. George Willard's Development**

15. How do Winesburg's inhabitants react to George's eminent departure?

Many extend themselves to come to the train station at George's departure time to see him off. They are not filled with sorrow or resentment, but affection and well wishes. After he boards, they turn, rather quickly, back to their own lives. Helen White runs to the station hoping to say goodbye, but just misses seeing him off.

16. Describe George's state of mind and feelings during his leave-taking of his hometown.

He is excited, on the edge of the unknown, and neither thinking nor feeling very deeply. There is psychological realism here in his focus on the exigencies of the moment. George is not particularly wise or impressive, just an ordinary young man, like many others who have made this leap before him, on the brink of a huge and exciting change of life.