

# Our Town Discussion Questions Act 1

Choose 3 of the following questions to answer about Act 1 of *Our Town*. You can email answers to [MarshallL@LeonSchools.net](mailto:MarshallL@LeonSchools.net) or upload on FOCUS/GRADEBOOK, REMIND, or TEAMS.

1. The play begins with the following stage directions: *No curtain. No scenery. The audience, arriving, sees an empty stage in half-light.* What do you believe is the significance of having no scenery in the play?
2. What connotations does the title have? What effect does it have on you as a reader?
3. How do you imagine the town described? What adjectives would you use to describe it?
4. If the play is symbolic of the human experience as a whole, then why do you think Thornton Wilder, the playwright, chose to spend all of Act 1 on a single day in the town?
5. Why are there so many churches mentioned?
6. Is there a significant reason why the Stage Director mentions the cemetery and then immediately mentions the birth of twins to the Polish family? And then tells how Mr. and Mrs. Gibbs later died right after they are introduced as characters in the play?
7. Are there any other places so far in Act 1 where we see both references to the perpetuation of life (birth, marriage, etc.) versus the inevitability of death?
8. What does Mrs. Gibbs' anecdote about the secondhand furniture man communicate about her and the town in general?
9. How does Mr. Webb describe the town? Does this description fall in line with how you pictured it in question 3?
10. Based on the questions they ask, how does the audience picture Grover's Corners? What are your opinions of the town so far? Can you relate to it at all? Why or why not?
11. What does the Stage Manager wish to include in the time capsule? What would they show about the town? Why do you think Thornton Wilder, the author, chose these particular things?
12. The Stage Manager gives a specific reason why he wants to include those things at the bottom of page 33. What is it? Furthermore, this play focuses a lot on the passing of time in our lives and the brevity of human life. Keeping this in mind, what do you think Thornton Wilder has to say about longevity of literature and art?

13. Emily, the choir ladies, Mrs. Gibbs, Rebecca Gibbs, and Mr. Webb all comment on the moon or the moonlight. What do you think the moon represents here? Why? (Hint: think about the other motif used in this section, the song the choir sings, which is mentioned twice.)
14. Rebecca tells her brother about her friend Jane's letter from her minister, addressed with a very lengthy, specific address. Why do you think Thornton Wilder includes this detail? Furthermore, notice how many times a character says something about thousands or millions. Why would these references be significant?
15. Look back over Act 1. Where do you see people appreciating the simple beauties in life?

## Our Town Study Guide Questions Act 2

Choose 3 of the following questions to answer about Act 2 of *Our Town*. You can email answers to [MarshallL@LeonSchools.net](mailto:MarshallL@LeonSchools.net) or upload on FOCUS/GRADEBOOK, REMIND, or TEAMS.

1. The Stage Manager observes that *“you’ve got to love life to have life, and you’ve got to have life to love life...it’s what they call a vicious cycle.”* What does this mean? What observation is he making about life?
2. In this act, we hear a lot of people’s thoughts about marriage. The Stage Manager says that *“Nature has been pushing and contriving in other ways, too: a number of young people fell in love and got married.”* Later, Mrs. Gibbs says that people are *“meant to go through life two by two”* and explains that it is isn’t natural to be *“lonesome.”* Then Mr. Gibbs tells George what a *“wonderful, wonderful thing”* marriage is. What is the overall view of marriage Thornton Wilder sets forth in this section?
3. Why does Mrs. Gibbs say that weddings are *“farces?”* A farce is a foolish, comedic show.
4. Where in Act 2 so far do you see evidence of the continuity and perpetuation of life and the inevitability of death? (*Remember that we talked during act 1 about all the references to the hopefulness of life in the face of death...Joe Crowell (death), the mention of the future death of the Gibbises (death), the babies being born (life), and the names on the tombstones being the same names as the people in Grover’s Corners, thus communicating that although they are dead and gone, their legacy lives on in their children...life again.*)
5. What does Emily mean when she is talking to George about *“men”* being able to be more perfect than *“girls”*? And come to think of it, is there any significance to her saying *“girls”* and *“men,”* instead of *“girls and boys”* or *“women and men?”* What is the significance?
6. Think about the conversation George and Emily have during this section. If the play hopes to give us a view of the typical human experience, what part of the universal human experience does this reflect or represent?
7. The Stage Manager begins an interesting discourse on the nature of weddings. He says two things to note:
  - a. *“There are a lot of things to be said about a wedding; there are a lot of thoughts that go on during a wedding. We can’t get them all into one wedding, naturally, and especially not into a wedding at Grover’s Corners, where they’re awfully plain and short.*

- b. *"This is a good wedding, but people are so put together that even at a good wedding there's a of confusion way down deep in people's minds and we thought that that ought to be in our play, too."*

What does the Stage Manager seem to imply by these comments? What does George and Emily's wedding represent on a greater level?

8. What do you think is the purpose of the Stage Manager's thoughts on nature and nature's interest in *"quality over quantity"*? Furthermore, he says, *"Every child born into the world is nature's attempt to make a perfect human being."* Where do you see this thought reflected in the action of the play and its characters? Is there a connection between this observation and the play?
9. Where in this part of the act do you see people mourning the passage of time?
10. Why does Emily say she has never felt so alone? What is she upset about?
11. If George and Emily represent, in a sense, all of us, what is the significance of Emily's line to George: *"All I want is someone to love me."* What observation does this make about humans?
12. Mrs. Soames says she always cries at weddings but she doesn't know specifically why; she guesses she just likes to see young people happy. Do you think there could be another subconscious reason why she is crying? What do you think that reason could be?
13. What is the overall tone of the second half of this act? (What is Thornton Wilder's attitude toward love and marriage?) What evidence of this is present in act 2? How is the tone different than the tone in the first act of the play?

## Our Town Discussion Questions Act 3

Choose 3 of the following questions to answer about Act 3 of *Our Town*. You can email answers to [MarshallL@LeonSchools.net](mailto:MarshallL@LeonSchools.net) or upload on FOCUS/GRADEBOOK, REMIND, or TEAMS.

1. Read the following passage and answer the questions based on this passage:

*“Now there are some things we all know, but we don’t take ’em out and look at ’em very often. We all know that something is eternal. And it ain’t houses and it ain’t names, and it ain’t earth, and it ain’t even the stars...everybody knows in their bones that something is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings. All the greatest people ever lived have been telling us that for five thousand years and yet you’d be surprised how people are always losing hold of it. There’s something way down deep that’s eternal about every human being.”*

- a. What do you think is the “eternal” present in all of us that the Stage Manager is discussing?
  - b. Why do you think people are always “losing hold” of the eternal *something*? What do you think that communicates about the human race?
  - c. How does the “eternal” in all of us not being “houses” connect to the fact that there is no scenery in the play? What is Wilder implying we should focus our attention on?
2. Were you surprised to hear what happened to Simon Stimson? In what ways is his death significant?
  3. How does Emily die? What is significant about how *she* dies? Think back to all the times in play where we see the juxtaposition of life and death and why that is significant.
  4. Why does Mrs. Soames say that life was “awful” but also “wonderful”? How could that be true?
  5. Upon joining the other dead people, Emily observes that “live people don’t understand.” What is it that they don’t understand?
  6. Emily also says she never “realized before how troubled and how...how in the dark live persons are...From morning till night, that’s all they are—troubled.” What does she mean by this? Why do you think she just realizes this now that she is dead?

7. Emily desperately wants to relive a day in her past, now that she is dead, but Mrs. Soames and the Stage Manager warn her doing so may be painful. The Stage Manager says that if she chooses to watch a day in the past, she will see “the thing that they—down there—never know” because she will know what is going to happen to them later, and this could be harder than she would expect. Why would this be true? Would you want the same opportunity if you were given the chance?
8. Why do you think Mrs. Gibbs tells Emily to choose the least important day in her life?
9. While Dead Emily is watching her living self relive her twelfth birthday party, she says, “*Oh! How young Mama looks! I didn’t know Mama was ever that young.*” What is the significance of this observation? What does it show about how we go through life? How does this relate to the motif of blindness? Why does Emily say that she “can’t look at everything hard enough”?
10. How do the following two quotes from Emily help communicate a theme in the play:
- a. *Oh, Mama, just look at me one minute as though you really saw me. Mama, fourteen years have gone by. I’m dead. You’re a grandmother, Mama. I married George Gibbs, Mama. Wally’s dead, too. Mama, his appendix burst on a camping trip to North Conway. We felt just terrible about it—don’t you remember? But, just for a moment now we’re all together. Mama, just for a moment we’re happy. Let’s look at one another.*
  - b. *Good-by, good-by, world. Good-by, Grover’s Corners...Mama and Papa. Good-by to clocks ticking...and Mama’s sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths...and sleeping and waking up. Oh, earth, you’re too wonderful for anybody to realize. (to the Stage Manager) Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it?—every, every minute?*
11. Why does Emily say that all human beings are “blind people?”
12. As the Stage Manager looks up at the stars at the end of the play, he says, “*There are the stars—doing their old, old crisscross journeys in the sky. Scholars haven’t settled the matter yet, but they seem to think there are no living beings up there...Only this one is straining away, straining away all the time to make something of itself. The strain’s so bad that every sixteen hours everybody lies down and gets a rest.*” What does this observation reflect about humans? How does Thornton Wilder believe we go about our life as humans?
13. Did you enjoy reading this play, why do you think Mrs. Marshall chose it for your class to read at this time in history (a Pandemic)? Does it have a lesson to teach us all at this time in our lives?

