

MAKING MEANINGS

First Thoughts

1. Think of the people you know in your own town or neighborhood. Compared with them, do these Spoon River characters sound real to you? Cite reasons to support your responses.

Shaping Interpretations

2. What does Richard Bone, the stone carver, come to realize about the people of Spoon River? What does he come to realize about himself?
3. How does Butch Weldy feel about the accident that ruined his life? What is the **tone** of his epitaph?
4. How does Fiddler Jones feel about his life? Cite passages from the poem to support your interpretation.
5. Appropriately, Petit, the poet, uses **metaphors** to talk about his experiences. In lines 1–3, what is he comparing his own poetry to? How does this small-town poet feel about his work—and why does he mention Homer and Whitman at the end of his epitaph?
6. Summarize Mrs. George Reece's advice. Do you think her husband would have agreed with her? Explain.
7. What significance can you find in some of the names that Masters gave his characters?
8. Compare the ways any two of these Spoon River speakers feel about life. Consider their feelings about their own work, their attitudes toward other people, and their responses to chance or fate.

Connecting with the Texts

9. If you had the chance, how would you reply to these speakers of *Spoon River Anthology*?

Extending the Texts

10. In what ways do the speakers' feelings—such as Bone's remorse or Petit's regrets—suggest universal **themes**? What experiences in today's world might produce a contemporary Butch Weldy, Fiddler Jones, or Mrs. George Reece?

CHOICES: Building Your Portfolio

Writer's Notebook

1. Collecting Ideas for an Interpretive Essay

A good focus for an interpretive essay is the writer's tone.



Tone refers to the writer's attitude toward his or her subject. Tone can be ironic, sentimental, critical, admiring, condescending, and so on. Read each *Spoon River* poem several times. Pay particular attention to word choice. How do you think Masters himself feels about each speaker? Cite specific details from the poems to support your interpretation. Keep your notes for possible use in the Writer's Workshop on page 804.


Analyzing the Poems

2. The American Way

In a brief essay, tell what the five *Spoon River* poems in this text say about life in a Midwestern American town in the early twentieth century. Consider the values of the people, their hopes and dreams, their problems, and their sense of community. What beliefs and experiences, in your opinion, make Masters's characters especially American? (You might want to read more *Spoon River* poems before writing.)

Speaking and Listening

3. *Spoon River* in Performance

The entire *Spoon River Anthology* has been performed onstage, with several  actors taking the parts of the speakers. Prepare these five poems for a performance of your own. The performers' first task is to analyze each character: What is this person's attitude toward life? What tone of voice would he or she speak in? You might wish to include music in your performance and to dress your speakers in some kind of costume (perhaps they could all dress in black). You might also add other Spoon Riverites to your performance. Ask your listeners to evaluate your performance.