

Worksheet 1. Glimpses of George Willard (teacher version)

Write what you can infer about the character George from each of the following excerpts taken from stories in *Winesburg, Ohio*. To clarify your understanding, examine the contexts of the passages.

Excerpt	Inferences
<p>“Pausing in his speech, Wing Biddlebaum looked long and earnestly at George Willard. His eyes glowed. Again he raised the hands to caress the boy and then a look of horror swept over his face.” (“Hands”)</p>	<p>Although Wing is appalled by his own behavior, which led to disaster in his past—there is no indication that George is disturbed by the familiar and affectionate gesture. George does not leap to an erroneous conclusion based on fear and insecurity.</p>
<p>“The tales that Doctor Percival told George Willard began nowhere and ended nowhere. Sometimes the boy thought they must all be inventions, a pack of lies. And then again he was convinced that they contained the very essence of truth.” (“The Philosopher”)</p>	<p>George is a patient and reflective listener, not prone to interrupt or ask another person to “get to the point.” He is coming to an understanding that fiction and truth are not opposites.</p>
<p>“Shaking with fright and anxiety the young reporter lurked in the hallway outside the door of the room in which Joe Welling talked to the two Kings. ... The listener in the hall walked up and down, lost in amazement.” (“A Man of Ideas”)</p>	<p>George is watchful, but hesitant to get involved when violence threatens to erupt in the hotel. Though he is not very courageous, at this moment George is in touch with his emotions and is surprised and amazed by human behavior.</p>
<p>“Perhaps a dozen times George Willard and the strange, shapeless man who lived in his father’s hotel had been on the point of talking. The young man looked at the hideous, leering face staring about the hotel dining room and was consumed with curiosity.” (“Respectability”)</p>	<p>What seems repulsive to most people arouses in George intense curiosity. He is fascinated by what makes people who and what they are. His curiosity can outweigh nervousness or immaturity in his uncertainty on how to act in new situations.</p>
<p>“George Willard, who had been sitting for an hour idly playing with a lead pencil, greeted him effusively. ‘I’ve been trying to write a love story,’ he explained, laughing nervously. Lighting a pipe, he began walking up and down the room. ‘I know what I’m going to do. I’m going to fall in love. I’ve been sitting here thinking it over and I’m going to do it.’” (“The Thinker”)</p>	<p>George is serious about being a writer, and he can see that personal experience is a necessary part of writing about people’s lives. In the area of love and romance, it is obvious he is still a neophyte.</p>

Lesson 2. George Willard's Development

<p>“The young reporter went willingly enough. Enoch Robinson asked him to go after the two had talked for ten minutes. The boy was a little afraid but had never been more curious in his life. A hundred times he had heard the old man spoken of as a little off his head and he thought himself rather brave and manly to go at all.” (“Loneliness”)</p>	<p>Again, as we repeatedly see in George, a strong curiosity prevails over uncertainty. He would like to see himself as courageous and virile, not held back by fear and insecurity.</p>
<p>“George Willard, he felt, belonged to the Town, typified the town, represented in his person the spirit of the town. . . . Did he not walk whistling and laughing through Main Street?” (“Queer”)</p>	<p>George appears on the outside to be confident and happy, untroubled by fears or doubts. This aura can arouse resentment and envy in others his age who feel insecure.</p>