

Cornell Notes: *Our Town* Act I

Key Points/Questions	Notes
<p>1. How does <i>Our Town</i> compare to other plays you have read and/or seen?</p>	<p><i>Our Town</i> defies conventions of drama in some key ways. For example, the stage manager plays a role in which he directly interacts with both the characters and the audience. He also appears to have a deep knowledge of the community, as though he is an omniscient narrator (though he interacts with the characters). The set uses minimal scenery, props, and lighting features.</p>
<p>2. What does this quotation reveal about the stage manager?</p> <p>“There’s Doc Gibbs comin’ down Main Street now, comin’ back from that baby case. And here’s his wife comin’ downstairs to get breakfast.... Doc Gibbs died in 1930. The new hospital’s named after him. Mrs. Gibbs died first long time ago, in fact.</p>	<p>According to the stage manager, the events happening on stage are taking place on May 7, 1901. However, the stage manager’s comment about Doc Gibbs dying in 1930 reveal that he has an omniscient understanding/view of all of the characters and events in the town from the past, present, and future. He is aware of things that the characters are not, and he can share these things with the audience.</p>
<p>3. Consider the stage manager’s comments about Joe. What do the comments reveal about the stage manager and his role in the play?</p>	<p>The stage manager states that Joe was going to be a great engineer, but that he died in the war and all of his education was for nothing. This - combined with the previous character introductions - shows that the stage manager is focused on sharing the death dates of the different characters in the play, even when it seems out of context for what is happening in the moment of the play.</p>
Summary	
<p>Emily: Emily is characterized as a kind, respectful girl who is bright and does well in school. Possible quotations from the text (accept any relevant lines):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Emily: I’m both, Mama: you know I am. I’m the brightest girl in school for my age. I have a wonderful memory. <p>George: George is characterized as a young man who appears to be somewhat mischievous. Possible quotations from the text (accept any relevant lines):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mrs. Gibbs: I declare, you got to speak to George. Seems like something’s come over him lately. He’s no help to me at all. I can’t even get him to cut me some wood. ● Rebecca: Mama, George’s throwing soap at me. 	

Cornell Notes: *Our Town* Act I

Key Points/Questions	Notes
4. What does the conversation between Mrs. Webb and Mrs. Gibbs suggest about the town and the people in it?	Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb have a neighborly conversation where they make simple conversation about their gardens and their families. Mrs. Gibbs shares that she was offered a large sum of money (for that day) for a piece of furniture in her house, and that she would love to sell it and take a vacation, but she shares she hesitates to bring this up with her husband and that he would not want to travel anyway. Their conversation reflects a small-town life where people know and gossip with their neighbors. The women's conversation also reflects a patriarchal society where women had more traditional roles in the home.
5. What does the professor's context suggest about the town and its people?	Grover's Corner is a small town with a population of 2640. Ethnicities suggest the town is mostly white ("English blue-eyed stock" with some recent slavic and Mediterranean individuals moving to the town).
6. What does Mr. Webb's description suggest about the town and its people?	Mr. Webb describes the town as an "ordinary town," which suggests that it is typical for a town of that size during the time period. Males over 21 can vote, and women vote indirectly, which continues to highlight the patriarchal nature and traditional role for women. He reinforces the idea that the townspeople tend to gossip by wanting to talk about who's rich and who's poor, and stresses details that paint a picture of an ordinary, not very "cultured" or wealthy town.
Summary	
<p>Grover's Corners is characterized as an ordinary, traditional, American, small-town from the early 20th century. In Grover's Corners, townspeople have friendly conversations with one another about their gardens and families. The details provided demonstrate that the town reflects traditional gender roles, with women staying inside the house/ being responsible for raising families. Possible text evidence (accept other relevant evidence):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mrs. Gibbs: Well, if I could get the Doctor to take the money and go away someplace on a real trip, I'd sell it like that. (demonstrates neighborly conversation/gossip, role of men/women) ● Professor: Oh, yes, indeed? The population, at the moment, is 2,642. (demonstrates small town/community) ● Well ... I don't have to tell you that we're run here by a Board of Selectmen. All males vote at the age of twenty-one. Women vote indirect. (demonstrates patriarchy) ● We're lower middle class: sprinkling of professional men . . . ten per cent illiterate laborers. (demonstrates working class aspect) ● Very ordinary town, if you ask me. Little better behaved than most. Probably a lot duller. But our young people here seem to like it well enough. Ninety per cent of 'em graduating from high school settle down right here to live even when they've been away to college. (demonstrates that people tend to stay in 	

Cornell Notes: *Our Town* Act I

Key Points/Questions	Notes
7. Describe the interaction between George and Emily. What does their interaction suggest about George?	George compliments Emily on her speech in class and tells her that she must be really bright and naturally smart. He also notes that she stays up doing her homework, which he can see from his bedroom window, and suggests that they create a telegraph system so she can give him hints. George shares that he hopes to inherit his uncle's farm. George's conversation with Emily suggests that he is not passionate about school, and he is only interested in baseball and his future in inheriting his uncle's farm.
8. Consider Emily's conversation with her mother and the placement of this scene in the play. What might this suggest about Emily?	Emily asks her mother if she is pretty enough for people (in other words, boys) to notice her. Given the placement of this scene immediately following Emily's interaction with George, the author seems to suggest or foreshadow their romantic relationship.
9. Compare George's conversation with his father and Emily's conversation with her mother. What do these differences suggest about family dynamics in Grover's Corners?	Dr. Gibbs has a brief and matter-of-fact conversation with George where he tells him that he notices that his mother was chopping wood since he didn't fulfill his chores. He then gives George an increase in his weekly spending money to demonstrate his faith in him that he will do what is asked of him. The conversation is an interesting juxtaposition with Emily's conversation with her mom; it reflects the traditional roles that men and women take in their families and underscores the patriarchal society.

Summary

Students should describe relationships that suggest family dynamics with traditional gender roles within a patriarchal society (e.g., Mrs. Webb and Emily stringing beans and discussing whether she is pretty; Dr. Gibb being the one to talk with George about his behavior and giving him an increased spending allowance). Students should also note that George and Emily have a friendship that also gives hints of a potential romance, as seen through George's complimenting of Emily's speech and intelligence and Emily questioning whether she's pretty immediately following their conversation. All of these things suggest that Grover's Corner is a typical, American small-town from the time period and could represent just about anywhere (thus, making its lessons relevant to all people and not just the citizens of Grover's Corners).

