

Middlemarch

Think about the events and actions of the novel. Explain how they relate to Eliot's full original title of '*Middlemarch: A study of provincial life*'.

Analysing the question

What is the question asking you?

- To look specifically at the plot and the actions in the novel
- To think about what Eliot's novel tells us about provincial life in her times

Preparing your ideas and arguments

- 1 Make notes about some of the things Eliot teaches us about provincial life (look at the notes in the introduction to help you).

Example:

- The people of Middlemarch love to gossip – and gossip can ruin people's lives.
- The townspeople are suspicious of outsiders and newcomers.
- The people of the town do not welcome change and new ideas.

- 2 Look at the list of key events in the novel and choose three or four key events that relate to your notes.

Example:

- Gossip about Dorothea's engagement to Casaubon
- The townspeople's reaction when they hear about Bulstrode's past
- The townspeople's reaction to Brooke's speech as candidate to become a Member of Parliament

- 3 Look back at the question and your analysis of the question. Read through your notes and organise them into an essay plan.

Writing your essay plan

You can construct your essay plan in any way that suits you – you can use bullet points or a table, or perhaps a diagram will help you. Experiment with different methods to find what suits you best.

Here is a **sample essay plan** that shows how you might construct your essay.

Essay plan

Paragraph 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Description of the society • Introduction of three main arguments 	Middlemarch is an example of a small town in England in the late 19th century – three main characteristics: love of gossip, suspicion of outsiders and resistance to change
Paragraph 2	Argument 1 Evidence from text	The townspeople love to gossip Example 1: Dorothea and Casaubon's engagement Example 2: Bulstrode's past
Paragraph 3	Argument 2 Evidence from text	The townspeople are suspicious of outsiders. Example: how they mistrust Bulstrode because he is an outsider. This mistrust extends to Lydgate because of his association with Bulstrode
Paragraph 4	Argument 3 Evidence from text	The townspeople are resistant to change and new ideas Example: not only from outsiders (Lydgate) but also from their own (Brooke)
Paragraph 5	Conclusion	Extend analysis from main events to whole novel

- 4 Read the key scenes again and choose quotations to use in your essay.
- 5 Write the essay. Remember to keep looking back at your plan. Don't lose sight of what your main points are, and make sure that everything you say ties in with these points. Try to make your points as clear and simple as possible and remember to use short, relevant quotations. When you've finished, read your essay again and answer these questions:
 - Have I answered the question?
 - Are my arguments clear?
 - Have I used evidence from the novel to support all my arguments?
 - Does my conclusion refer to the novel as a whole?

Sample essay

Think about the events and actions of the novel. Explain how they relate to Eliot's full original title of '*Middlemarch: A study of provincial life*'.

Middlemarch is a small, provincial town in late 19th century England. It is thought to be based on Coventry, where Eliot lived as a young woman. But it is not only a portrait of Coventry; the people of Middlemarch are much the same as the people of any other provincial town of its size, anywhere in the country. They love to gossip about each other, they are suspicious of newcomers and do not like new ideas and change, especially when they are brought by outsiders.

Gossip is used throughout the novel as a way to comment both on the actions of the novel, and on the townspeople. For example, when Dorothea accepts Edward Casaubon's marriage proposal, 'the people of Middlemarch were very surprised when they heard the news and everyone thought it was very strange'. The marriage does not match the town's expectations and is therefore 'strange'. This is a typical characteristic of provincial towns, where everyone is expected to behave in a 'normal' way. With Bulstrode, the townspeople use gossip as a weapon to destroy him:

'The gossip had started and soon it began to grow and grow. No one in Middlemarch had ever liked Bulstrode. He had always thought himself better than other people. Now those people had a chance to make him look very bad.'

It is no good trying to keep a secret in Middlemarch. Bulstrode's criminal past becomes known and the townspeople use gossip to drive him out of the town.

The townspeople of Middlemarch do not like outsiders and Bulstrode is no exception, 'they knew nothing about his family and his early life.' This makes them uneasy. They like to know as much as possible about each other. They judge people by their background and family, as well as their actions. An outsider will always be open to suspicion, so when the gossips associate the young Doctor Lydgate with Bulstrode, they are quick to think the worst of him, because he too is an outsider:

'He had not been born in Middlemarch and neither had Bulstrode. The people of Middlemarch decided that they did not need strangers to look after their business.'

They also mistrust Lydgate because of his 'modern' ideas:

'The people of Middlemarch did not like new ideas.'

They are almost pleased to hear that he is in financial trouble:

'So, the young doctor's new ideas didn't work after all!'

But it isn't only outsiders who are criticized for wanting to bring change; Mr Brooke is also rejected by the people of Middlemarch for trying to force modern, foreign ideas on them. Sir James Chettam tries to warn him:

'People who live in the countryside or in small towns like Middlemarch do not like change.'

But Brooke ignores Chettam's advice and when he stands before the people of Middlemarch as a possible candidate for Parliament, they shout at him and laugh at his ideas:

' "In Middlemarch we do what's good for ourselves – not for other countries!" '

The people of Middlemarch care very little about Brooke's ideas and his politics. They are far more interested in how he runs his land and treats the local farm workers. They are far more interested in themselves and their town than in anything else. Their lives, their interests, their hopes and their fears are all focused on their community. Middlemarch is a typical provincial town and the novel is, amongst other things, a detailed and clever study of provincial life.

There are no heroes or villains in *Middlemarch*, only ordinary people, living ordinary lives.

Write a short essay in response to the statement above. Describe three main characters. Discuss to what extent they represent 'ordinary people' and who they represent in Eliot's 'study of provincial life'.

Analysing the question

What is the question asking you?

- To think about the concept of what a hero/villain is
- To think about what 'ordinary' means

It is also asking you to:

- look in detail at three main characters in the novel
- comment on whether they are heroic or villainous in any way
- explain what the characters tell us about provincial life.

Preparing your ideas and arguments

- 1 Consider what the terms 'hero/heroine' and 'villain' mean. Make notes on any actions in the novel that can be considered either a) heroic or b) villainous. For example:
 - **heroic:** Dorothea's self sacrifice in marrying Casaubon, Will's strength of character in refusing Bulstrode's offer of money
 - **villainous:** Casaubon's treatment of Dorothea, his jealousy and the conditions of his will.
- 2 Decide which three characters you are going to describe. For example, Dorothea, Ladislav and Casaubon. Make sure you choose key characters and that you have a mixture of 'heroic' and 'villainous' characters.

3 Use the table in the worksheet to make notes about the characters. For example:

Name	In what way ordinary?	Who do they represent?
Dorothea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependent on husband • Has not received an education 	Daughters of rich landowners
Will Ladislaw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works for a living • Receives money and support from wealthy relatives 	Outsiders – the wider world
Casaubon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used to telling people what to do • Supports dependent relatives • Uses money to exert power over people 	Wealthy landowners

4 Look back at the question and your analysis of the question. Read through your notes and organise them into an essay plan. Here's an example:

Essay plan

Introduction

- General discussion of what a hero or villain is in the context of a novel
- Identify three key characters who fit those roles: Dorothea, Will and Casaubon
- Explain that they are basically ordinary, but that ordinary people also find themselves in situations when they have to make difficult decisions. Their decisions can be regarded as heroic or villainous

Character 1: Dorothea

- Brief description of Dorothea and how ordinary she is
- Exploration of decisions which could be considered heroic e.g. sacrifices herself – 1) to Casaubon; 2) for love of Ladislaw
- What Dorothea stands for in the bigger picture of the novel i.e. both the restrictions of the old order, dependent on her husband and her uncle; and a new way of life, using her money and position to do good in London

Character 2: Will Ladislaw

- Brief description of Will Ladislaw and how ordinary he is: his lifestyle possibly the most 'extraordinary' of all the characters – no immediate family ties, an artist, has travelled, very much a 'free agent', doesn't really engage in the life and community of Middlemarch
- Exploration of decisions that could be considered heroic: refuses money from Bulstrode, ready to sacrifice his happiness so that Dorothea can keep Casaubon's money
- What Will stands for in the novel: he's an outsider, he represents the wider world – and an escape route for Dorothea

Character 3: Edward Casaubon

- Brief description of Casaubon
- Exploration of his role as 'villain': thoroughly unlikeable, at no time do we feel any sympathy for him, his house is a prison, and he feels no compassion for his young wife, only possessiveness and jealousy. Not content with ruining her life when he is alive, he does his best to ruin it after his death
- What Casaubon stands for: money – wealthy landowners and their power over others

Conclusion

- Yes, they are ordinary people, but ordinary people too have to make difficult decisions and can choose to act heroically or villainously

- 5 Write the essay. Remember to keep looking back at your plan. Try to make your points as clear and simple as possible and use short quotations where relevant.

When you've finished, read your essay again and answer these questions:

- Have I answered the question?
- Are my arguments clear?
- Have I used evidence from the novel to support my arguments?
- Does my conclusion refer to the novel as a whole?

Sample essay

There are no heroes or villains in *Middlemarch*, only ordinary people, living ordinary lives.

If a heroine is the main female character of a novel, then Dorothea Brooke is clearly the heroine of *Middlemarch* and Will Ladislav is her hero. If we consider the main storyline of the novel, the love story between Dorothea and Will Ladislav, then it is clear that Edward Casaubon is the villain. But they are not heroes or villains in the usual understanding of these terms. Dorothea and Will do not risk their lives or make dramatic sacrifices. They are basically ordinary people, living ordinary lives. Yet the way they choose to live their lives is, in some way, remarkable. They choose to live by their principles rather than be manipulated by the will of an old and jealous man. This, in the time and society of *Middlemarch*, is a brave thing to do. Casaubon too is, in many ways, a very ordinary man. He is weak and foolish. He is not an evil villain who terrifies the other characters, or intends for the most part to actively cause harm to others. Yet his treatment of his beautiful young wife is villainous, so is his jealousy of Will and his attempts to ruin the couple's future chances of happiness – his selfishness and pride cause him to act in unheroic and villainous ways.

Dorothea Brooke is, in many ways, a very ordinary person. Like other young women in her class, she is dependent on the money and status of the men around her. She has very little education and is expected to make a good marriage and to become a good wife and mother. She accepts the importance of this role. But in many other ways she is certainly not typical of women of her age and position. She doesn't want the usual pleasures of a girl her age. She isn't interested in 'fashionable clothes and curling her hair' like her sister, Celia. She is different:

'Dorothea had strong opinions about many things...She wanted to use her mind and think for herself ... She wanted to use her money to make the little world of Middlemarch a better place.'

Dorothea is an idealist. She thinks of others before herself. She is ready to sacrifice herself and her happiness to be 'useful' in her marriage to Edward Casaubon and in helping him with his work. She holds strong beliefs and stands by them. When the whole town turns its back on Tertius Lydgate, she stands by the young doctor. She continues to believe in him, she lends him money and helps him regain his reputation. This moral strength is not ordinary in Middlemarch. Most people choose to follow the crowd, to behave according to established ideas and expectations. And most people live happily like this. But Dorothea questions these ideas and chooses her own way. She rebels against the provincial ways of Middlemarch and in fact, in her happy ending, she moves away from Middlemarch to work 'for the good of society'. Her new role, working alongside her second husband, represents a change that was taking place in society at the time, and in the lives of women.

Will Ladislav is also an ordinary person, living an ordinary life in a very ordinary world. His parents, like Dorothea's, are dead, and he is dependent on his cousin, Edward Casaubon's, money. He has to make the very ordinary decision of which career to choose, which path to take through life. This decision is faced by many of the characters in *Middlemarch*. But Will is not typical of the young men of Middlemarch. He, too, is different. He has travelled. He has experienced other cultures and he looks further than the provincial life which surrounds him. He does not feel he must behave according to its norms, nor does he give importance to social status. Like Dorothea, his principles are far more

important to him than money. He shows this when he refuses Bulstrode's offer to give him money to make up for his lost inheritance:

'My mother knew her family's money was made in a dishonourable way,' Will said in an angry voice. 'That was why she ran away. My honour is as important to me as my mother's was to her – so I refuse to take a penny of your dirty money.'

Will, his ideals and his chosen path in life represent a changing world and social order that exists beyond Middlemarch. He belongs to a new social class who are trying to reform and improve society.

Edward Casaubon is a very unlikeable man, which makes him a perfect villain. We do not sympathise with him at all. He has no good features – he is weak, selfish, disagreeable and boring. His treatment of Dorothea is terrible. His house is described as a prison – dark, cold and unwelcoming. He never speaks any words of love to his beautiful young wife and he treats her like a slave. Not happy with making her unhappy while he is alive, he tries to make sure she will continue to be unhappy after his death. He tries to make Dorothea promise to continue his work, a promise which luckily she has no time to make. He uses his will as a weapon to control Dorothy. Casaubon represents wealthy landowners. He, like other landowners, is used to controlling people, telling them what to do and using his money to make sure they do as he wishes. But not all the landowners in the novel are as bad as Casaubon. Mr Brooke has his faults, but he is human, warm, and kind-hearted. Sir James Chettam is a very conservative landowner, but he runs his land well and looks after his family. Casaubon is not just a typical landowner. He is much more. He is a villain, a man without a heart, filled with jealousy and an obsession with his worthless academic studies, and achieving regard for himself.

Yes, it is true that *Middlemarch* tells the story of ordinary people living ordinary lives, but it also tells the story of how ordinary people sometimes do extraordinary things. It shows that heroism and villainy are not things that are different from everyday life, but are part of the world we live in.

Q1 Think about the significance of money in Middlemarch. Comment on the good and bad uses of money in the novel and discuss how it affects people's choices.

Analysing the question

What is the question asking you?

- To talk about money and how it operates in Middlemarch
- To talk about concrete examples of good and bad use of money
- To give an example of how money influences people's choices

Preparing your ideas and arguments

- 1 Make a list of examples of uses of money in Middlemarch and of how money influences people's choices. For example:
 - Dorothea marries a rich man.
 - Celia marries a rich man.
 - Rosamund wants to marry a rich man – but doesn't.
 - Lydgate needs to have wealthy patients who pay him well in order to be able to finance his work with the poor; once he marries Rosamund his money problems become more and more urgent and he is eventually forced to give up his work with the poor.
 - Bulstrode uses money to try and buy respectability and a position in society.
 - Casaubon tries to use his money to control Dorothea after his death.
 - Brooke tries to use his money to persuade the people of Middlemarch to vote for him.
 - Dorothea uses her money to help the poor.
 - Dorothea uses her money to help Lydgate pay his debt to Bulstrode.
 - Bulstrode uses his property and money to help Peter Garth.
 - Will Ladislav refuses Bulstrode's money because of the way it was made.
 - Dorothea renounces her money for love.

- 2 Look at your notes and try to identify any general themes of:

a) The importance of money

For example:

Marriage: All the young couples have to think of the money issue when they decide to get married. Not giving it enough importance (i.e. Lydgate and Rosamund) results in disaster.

Work: The wealthy landowners do not contemplate work as a choice for their children; the children of the tradesmen have to work for a living – Mary Garth, Peter Vincy.

b) Good use of money

When characters use their money to help others in a selfless way – Dorothea helps the poor, she also helps Lydgate, Bulstrode helps Peter Vincy – their actions are successful.

c) Misuse of money

When characters use their money in selfish ways – Bulstrode tries to buy respectability and social status, Casaubon tries to keep Dorothea and Will Ladislav apart, Mr Brooke buys a newspaper to broadcast his political views – they fail.

- 3 Look back at the question and your analysis of the question. Read through your notes and organise them into an essay plan. Here's an example:

Essay plan

Introduction

- Money is important and influences people's choices e.g. marriage choices
- Ignoring the importance of money gets you into trouble
- Tertius and Rosamund don't give it enough thought and get into trouble

General discussion of use of money to fulfil ambitions

- Good use = for selfless reasons – generally successful
- Misuse = selfish, self-serving reasons – generally fails

Examples of good use

- Dorothea – poor people, new hospital, Lydgate
- Bulstrode – Peter Vincy

Examples of abuse of money

- Bulstrode again – buying respectability – bribing Raffles – loan to Lydgate
- Brooke – buying newspaper – not using money well on his land
- Casaubon's will – completely backfires – brings the couple together rather than pushing them apart

Money can corrupt

- Peter Vincy: before and after finding out he wasn't going to inherit a fortune from his uncle

Conclusion

- Money must be used well and/or earned honestly or it can be dangerous
- The happiest people are the ones that put other values before money and make money work to help them live by those values

- 4 Write the essay. Remember to keep looking back at your plan. Try to make your points as clear and simple as possible and use short quotations where relevant.

When you've finished, read your essay again and answer these questions:

- Have I answered the question?
- Are my arguments clear?
- Have I used evidence from the novel to support my arguments?
- Does my conclusion give a clear, general statement about the topic?

Sample essay

Think about the significance of money in *Middlemarch*. Comment on the good and bad uses of money in the novel and discuss how it affects people's choices.

There is no doubt that money is important in *Middlemarch* and that it affects people and their decisions. This is seen very clearly in one of the main themes of the novel, marriage. No young couple can get married without first thinking about the financial side of their relationship. It doesn't matter how in love they are. When Tertius Lydgate and Rosamund Vincy rush into their marriage without thinking about its importance, the result is disaster. The couple are soon in financial trouble, the young doctor gets into debt and damages his reputation by accepting money from Bulstrode. He is finally forced to give up his ambitions when he moves to London to become a doctor to wealthy, society patients.

The novel includes many examples of how people try to use money to achieve their ambitions. There are examples of good use, and there are examples of misuse. When money is used with good intentions, the ambitions are generally achieved. But when characters use money to fulfil selfish ambitions, their actions generally fail.

Dorothy is generally successful in using her money to help people. She helps the poor people in the town get better housing, she uses it to sponsor the new hospital, and she uses it to help get Lydgate out of debt. When Bulstrode uses his money selflessly, he too achieves his ambitions. When his past has been discovered and he is preparing to leave *Middlemarch*, he asks Peter Vincy to manage his land for him. This allows Peter to fulfil his one main ambition: to marry Mary Garth. It is the only time that Bulstrode truly succeeds in using his money to help people.

Bulstrode generally uses money for his own, selfish purposes. He uses it to try to buy respectability and social status. It seems that he has been successful, but his money was originally made by illegal and immoral means, and his secret past eventually catches up with him. He tries to buy John Raffles's silence, but money is not enough to save him or his reputation. He gives Lydgate a generous loan as a token of his thanks for looking after Raffles before his death. Bulstrode means for this loan to help the doctor, but it does quite the opposite. The townspeople believe that the loan is given because Lydgate was somehow involved in the death of John Raffles. The young doctor's reputation is seriously damaged and soon afterwards he is forced to leave the town.

Mr Brooke also tries to use his money to further his own personal ambitions. He buys a local newspaper to promote his political ideas and try to win the votes of the townspeople, but his plan goes wrong. The people of *Middlemarch* do not judge him for his political ideas, but for his misuse of money. He is seen as a bad landowner. He does not spend enough money on his land and on helping the local people who live and work on it. To the people of *Middlemarch* this shows that he does not care about them but only about his own ambition to become a Member of Parliament.

The most obvious example of the misuse of money is that of Casaubon's will. Edward Casaubon is a wealthy landowner. He has no immediate family. He chooses to marry Dorothea, not from love, but because he thinks it would be useful to have a companion, 'someone who would help him complete his life's work.' His motivations are purely selfish at all times. When his beautiful young wife becomes friends with his handsome young cousin, Will Ladislaw, Casaubon is filled with jealousy. He believes that Ladislaw is planning to marry Dorothea once he is dead in order to get his hands on Casaubon's money. So he changes his will, stating that Dorothea will lose all her inheritance if she marries Ladislaw. But the will actually brings the two young people together, rather than pushing them apart. And Dorothea, who has grown to hate the memory of her late husband, is more than happy to give up Casaubon's money and start a new life with the man she loves.

Money is sometimes seen as having a negative effect on people and their choices. It can trap them, or turn them into worthless people. While Peter Vincy thought that he would be rich once his uncle Peter Featherstone died, he did nothing useful with his life. He went to university, but did not complete his course, he was lazy and unambitious. He had no need to create a life for himself. When Peter Featherstone surprised everyone by leaving all his money to his secret son, Peter's attitude changed. He now had to take responsibility for his own life. He was suddenly more focused and ambitious. The promise of the 'easy' money of an inheritance had had a negative effect on him. He had been ready to live a worthless life. But the reality of needing to provide for himself and his family helped him find a real direction and focus for his energies.

To sum up, money is obviously important in everyone's life, but it must be earned honestly through hard work, or used generously and selflessly to help others. The happiest, most successful and fulfilled characters in the novel are those who have managed to make a life for themselves, despite money. They are people who put other values before money. People like Dorothea and Ladislav, or Mary Garth and Peter Vincy, who put the principles of honesty, trust, respect and love before money and use money to help them live by those values.

Q2 Discuss the difficulties involved in 'making a good marriage'. Think about the difference between what people are looking for in a marriage and the reality of married life. Take two examples from the novel and describe the problems experienced by the two couples.

Analysing the question

What is the question asking you?

- To discuss the theme of marriage
- To think about what a good marriage is in the context of the novel
- To consider why a good marriage is important and why it is difficult
- To analyse two examples of marriages in the novel, giving details about what the couple wanted from the marriage; how this contrasts with the reality of married life

Preparing your ideas and your arguments

1 Make notes about what a good marriage is in the context of the novel. For example:

The novel looks at the idea of 'making a good marriage' from the woman's point of view. A good marriage is a marriage which gives the woman financial security and a position in society. But the novel also looks at what makes a successful marriage from both partners' points of view. Respect, trust, love and moral support are also seen as being important in a successful marriage (e.g. Harriet Bulstrode stands by her husband despite his troubles, Mary Garth believes in Peter and patiently waits for him to find his direction in life).

2 Make notes about why a good marriage is a) important b) difficult. For example:

a) Why a good marriage is important

In a time when there was no welfare state and when it was difficult, if not impossible, for a woman to have a career, and certainly not to have both a career and a family, a good marriage was the only guarantee of financial security.

b) Why making a good marriage was difficult

There was competition for rich husbands, especially in a small town such as Middlemarch. To make both a good and a successful marriage was difficult. In the context of the novel it is rare that both love and money coincide. Celia, who makes the best marriage, is well aware that she is second choice and that money is the main consideration in marrying Sir Chettam, but their marriage is successful because both partners accept and believe in the necessity of a marriage based on class, money and social status. But the main difficulty is that often the two partners go into the marriage with different ideas about what a marriage should be and are disappointed by the reality of married life.

- 3 Choose two marriages where the couples have problems in married life, for example, Dorothea and Casaubon, and Rosamund and Lydgate.

Make notes about the two marriages under these headings:

- What they are looking for in the marriage?
- Why does the reality disappoint them?
- What problems do they face?

	Dorothea and Casaubon	Rosamund and Lydgate
What they are looking for?	<p>Dorothea wants a father figure, an intelligent, older man to look up to and admire. She wants to be useful and do good by helping her husband.</p> <p>Casaubon wants a companion and an assistant in his work, someone who will meekly obey all his orders and not question him or his ideas.</p>	<p>Rosamund wants a handsome, rich husband who will look after her, admire her, and guarantee her a position in society.</p> <p>Lydgate doesn't really want to get married, but he is impulsive and easily manipulated by Rosamund's beauty and her tears. He proposes to her despite himself.</p> <p>They both believe, as does Rosamund's family, that the family will inherit Peter Featherstone's wealth and that the young couple won't have any financial problems.</p>
Why does the reality disappoint them?	<p>Dorothea: In Rome it becomes obvious to Dorothea that Casaubon is not interested in his wife's offers of help, or in discussing his work with her. She also finds out from Will Ladislaw that Casaubon is not the great scholar she had taken him for.</p> <p>Casaubon: soon realises that his young wife has a mind of her own and is not as submissive and meek as he'd like.</p>	<p>Rosamund: Lydgate's family (his uncle is a baronet) will not support him financially. Lydgate does not make enough money to pay for the lifestyle she thinks she deserves.</p> <p>Lydgate: Rosamund does not help or support him when they have financial problems. She is selfish and thinks only of her own comfort and social position. She is not a loving, supportive wife.</p>
What problems do they face?	<p>Casaubon becomes more and more jealous of Will Ladislaw.</p> <p>His ill health means that Dorothea dare not contradict him.</p>	<p>Money: Peter Featherstone does not leave them money. The Baronet refuses Rosamund's request for money, the couple get into debt.</p> <p>Status: Rosamund is not prepared to support her husband's ideals and goals, as she is more interested in improving her status in society and having a comfortable life.</p>

- 4 Read through the passages that describe the couple's thoughts and opinions both before they get married and afterwards. Make a note of any interesting and relevant quotations. For example:

Dorothea

'Her idea of a husband was an intelligent, older man who would guide her and teach her, like a father.' Casaubon's marriage proposal 'opened a door to a new world. It was a world where she could do some good and help someone more intelligent than herself.'

'Dorothea felt a strong fear that all her husband's work might have been a waste of time.'

Casaubon

'Edward Casaubon saw Dorothea as a useful companion, someone who would help him complete his life's work.'

Rosamund

'She planned to marry a rich, ambitious and handsome man from a good family who would admire her beauty and give her everything that she wanted.'

'When Doctor Lydgate came to live in the town, Rosamond Vincy thought she had found her perfect husband.'

' "When I am married to Tertius, I will take my place in the very best Middlemarch society," Rosamond thought to herself. "When Tertius is rich and famous, everyone will forget that I used to be Rosamond Vincy, whose father was only a manufacturer." '

Lydgate

'Though he believed that Rosamond Vincy would make someone the perfect wife, Lydgate knew that he could not afford to marry for several years.'

'When he left the house half-an-hour later, Lydgate found that somehow, he had become engaged to the beautiful Rosamond.'

- 5 Look back at the question and your analysis of the question. Read through your notes and organise them in an essay plan. You'll find an example on the next page.

Essay plan

Introduction

- Brief discussion of what a good marriage is. Give an example of a good marriage
- Brief discussion of the difficulties involved in making a good marriage and introduction to the idea of the contrast between what the couple want from marriage and the reality of married life
- Introduce the two marriages you are going to look at in detail

Marriage 1: Dorothea and Casaubon and Marriage 2: Rosamund and Lydgate

Talk about each marriage in terms of:

- what the couple are looking for
- why they are disappointed
- what problems they face.

Conclusion

- Explain how the two marriages relate to the general theme of marriage and the novel's message: the novel's definition of a successful marriage.

- 6 Write your essay. As you write remember to look back at your plan, your initial notes and the quotations you've chosen. Remember to make your points simply and clearly and keep looking back at the original question to make sure that all your points are relevant.

When you've finished, read your essay again and answer these questions:

- Have I answered the question?
- Are my arguments clear?
- Have I used evidence from the novel to support my arguments?
- Does my conclusion give a clear, general statement about the topic?

Sample essay

Discuss the difficulties involved in 'making a good marriage'. Think about the difference between what people are looking for in a marriage and the reality of married life. Take two examples from the novel and describe the problems experienced by the two couples.

Making a 'good marriage' was of great importance in Eliot's society. A 'good marriage' meant a marriage to a rich man, or woman, preferably from a 'good' family – usually a family which was rich and owned land. In *Middlemarch*, the marriage between Celia Brooke and Sir James Chettam is a perfect example of a 'good marriage'. It is also a good example of a successful marriage, a marriage where both partners are satisfied that both their expectations and their needs have been met by the reality of married life.

Making a good and successful marriage was not easy. There was competition for rich husbands, especially in a small town like Middlemarch. But the main difficulty was that the two partners often went into the marriage with different ideas about what a marriage should be. They were then disappointed by the reality of married life.

One example of this is the marriage between Dorothea Brooke and Edward Casaubon. From a purely financial point of view, this is a very 'good' marriage. Casaubon is wealthy, his family is an old, established, landowning family. He is serious and responsible and unlikely to do anything foolish with his money. But money is not enough for the marriage to be considered a good match. No-one approves of the marriage. Sir James Chettam is shocked and angry, the townspeople are surprised. Dorothea's sister Celia has tears in her eyes when she hears the news. But Dorothea is determined and will not change her mind.

Dorothea has a very clear idea of what she wants in a husband:

'Her idea of a husband was an intelligent, older man who would guide her and teach her, like a father.'

She thinks that she has found the perfect husband in Casaubon with his scholarly interests. Casaubon's marriage proposal 'opened a door to a new world. It was a world where she could do some good and help someone more intelligent than herself.'

Casaubon in turn thinks that he has found a 'useful companion, someone who would help him complete his life's work.' There is no love in his proposal, his idea of a wife is of someone who will quietly obey all his orders and not question him or his ideas. Both are deeply disappointed by the reality of married life.

Dorothea soon finds out that her husband is not the great scholar that she believed him to be. She tries to help him with his work, but is constantly rejected. It becomes obvious that he will never start his great book, let alone finish it. Casaubon neglects his young wife from the very beginning and when she makes friends with his handsome young cousin, Will Ladislav, Casaubon becomes unreasonably jealous. His wife cannot even mention his name without angering her husband. Dorothea very soon comes to think of her marriage as a 'mistake', but she never gives up trying to be a good wife. Casaubon, on the other hand, continues his selfishness even after death when he adds a condition to his will forbidding Dorothea to marry Will Ladislav.

The marriage of Rosamund and Tertius Lydgate contrasts greatly to that of Dorothea and Casaubon. They are both young and attractive, and apparently in love. Although it may not be the most

financially solid marriage, from the outside there is every reason to think that the young couple will be very happy together. But here too there is a conflict between what Rosamund and Tertius expect from their marriage and the reality of married life.

Rosamund knows exactly what she wants, '[s]he planned to marry a rich, ambitious and handsome man from a good family who would admire her beauty and give her everything that she wanted.' She thinks that Tertius is that man and she is determined to make him fall in love with her. Tertius too thinks that 'Rosamond Vincy would make someone the perfect wife' although he is realistic about his financial position, he 'knew that he could not afford to marry for several years.' However, Rosamund is very determined and Tertius soon finds himself 'somehow' getting engaged to be married.

The couple's problems start before they even get married. Rosamund's uncle Peter Featherstone dies without leaving her the large inheritance she had hoped for. Rosamund's father tries to persuade her to give up the marriage, now that it is no longer 'good', but fails. Rosamund still believes that that Lydgate will give her the social status she craves.

' "When I am married to Tertius, I will take my place in the very best Middlemarch society," Rosamond thought to herself. "When Tertius is rich and famous, everyone will forget that I used to be Rosamond Vincy, whose father was only a manufacturer." '

The reality of married life is very different from Rosamund's childish daydreams. She and Tertius both spend too much and they are soon in debt. Rosamund refuses to help her husband save money and Tertius begins to despair of his beautiful, young wife. It becomes obvious that she is selfish and vain, only interested in herself and is not the supportive, loving wife that Tertius had expected. Although Dorothea helps Rosamund see her mistake, the marriage is still not a success. Lydgate has to sacrifice his ambitions to concentrate on making enough money to support his wife, whilst Rosamund refuses to give anything up in order to help or support her husband.

Both Dorothea and Rosamund's first marriages are unsuccessful because they are not based on realistic expectations. Both girls make choices that are the result of inexperience. They marry for very different reasons, but both are equally disappointed by the result. Both make 'bad' marriages that do not take into account the most important values of a successful marriage: mutual trust, respect and support. A 'good' marriage, as described in the novel, is a marriage where both partners enter into the marriage with the same expectations and both contribute equally to the success of the partnership. Any couple hoping to live a happy and successful life must try to find this balance in order to make a truly 'good' marriage.

- Q3 Give a brief description of the class structure in Middlemarch. Think about the various families described, the contact between them and how their lives are connected.

Analysing the question

What is the question asking you?

- To describe the structure of society in Middlemarch
- To describe the social position of each family
- To describe any contact between the families
- To cite Middlemarch as a typical provincial town

Preparing your ideas and arguments

- 1 Draw a chart that shows all the main families described, their social position and any connections between the families. Identify which families are: landowners; professionals; tradesmen and farmers. Include information about the dependents of each family.
- 2 Write notes about the various classes and any contact between them.

For example:

All the landowners and their families know each other, they are inter-related (Celia is married to Chettam, Dorothea is married to Casaubon, this makes Casaubon and Chettam brothers- in-law) and often visit each other's homes. The Vincys stand as an example of such a family: Peter is married to Mary, a farm manager's daughter; his aunt Harriet is married to the banker Bulstrode and his sister Rosamund to the doctor, Tertius Lydgate.

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Tertius Lydgate floats freely between the classes. He is from a good family (his uncle is a baronet) so he is welcome in the homes of the landowners who employ him as their personal doctor. He is welcome in the homes of the wealthy tradesmen, the Vincys and the Bulstrodes, and he also visits the poorer families in his position as doctor. He is almost the only character who has access to all levels of society.

- 3 Read back through any passages that describe the town in general, the social classes and any contact between them.

Middlemarch was a small town in the middle of England. In 1829, when this story begins, England was beginning to change in many ways. But these changes were slow in coming to Middlemarch. The people there preferred the old ways and they did not like change at all.

The manufacturers, the tradesmen and the farmers all knew each other and many of them belonged to the same families. They respected wealthy people like the Brookes who owned land and lived in the big houses outside the town, but they gossiped about them too. The people of Middlemarch often laughed at Mr Brooke and his unusual political ideas. They did not understand his niece, Dorothea, either, and her coming marriage to Mr Casaubon surprised them very much. The people of Middlemarch waited to see what would happen next. Dorothea knew nothing of this gossip as she prepared herself for married life.

The Vincys were related to nearly all the respectable families in Middlemarch. Mr Vincy's sister was married to Mr Bulstrode, the rich banker. The Vincys were not as rich or as important as the Brookes and they were never invited to Tipton Grange. But the Vincys had always worked hard and they were well respected in the town.

- 4 Make notes about the main characteristics of the town and its people. For example:
- The town is conservative and backward-looking, the people of the town are not interested in new ideas and change.
 - The various classes are distinct and separate, the lower classes gossip about the higher classes, the higher classes do not always have a clear concept of what the lower classes think of them (Mr Brooke on entering politics, Dorothea on getting engaged to Casaubon).
 - There is interdependence: the landowners depend on the farmers to farm their land; the farmers depend on the landowners to treat them fairly. The wealthier classes have a moral obligation to look after the poorer members of the community (Dorothea, Bulstrode, Lydgate).
- 5 Look back at the question and your analysis of the question. Read through your notes and organise them in an essay plan. Have a look at the sample essay plan below.

Essay plan

Introduction	A brief introduction to the town of Middlemarch
The social structure	A description of the social structure: the distinct classes described in the novel
The key families	A description of the families and their roles (the Brookes, the Vincys, the Garths)
Contact between the families	A description of the role of other key figures and how they fit into the class system (Lydgate, Will Ladislaw)
Middlemarch as a typical provincial town	Showing how the characteristics of Middlemarch as described in the novel can be applied to any provincial town
Conclusion	Through the stories of the various families and individuals and how their lives affect each others', Eliot draws a detailed picture of life in a provincial town, hence the full title, ' <i>Middlemarch: A study of provincial life</i> '.

- 6 Write your essay. As you write remember to look back at your plan, your initial notes and the quotations you've chosen. Remember to make your points simply and clearly and keep looking back at the original question to make sure that all your points are relevant.

When you've finished, read your essay again and answer these questions:

- Have I answered the question?
- Are my arguments clear?
- Have I used evidence from the novel to support my arguments?
- Does my conclusion give a clear, general statement about the topic?

Sample essay

Give a brief description of the class structure in Middlemarch. Think about the various families described, the contact between them and how their lives are connected.

Middlemarch is a small town in the middle of England in the early 19th century. The town, like its characters, does not really exist, but it represents most small towns in England at that time in history.

There are various layers to the society in Middlemarch. The landowners live in big houses outside the town. They are generally wealthy and do not need to work for a living, though some have interests which bring them close to the world of work. Mr Brooke is interested in politics and would like to be a Member of Parliament. Mr Casaubon preaches in his own chapel every Sunday and carries out academic research. Some landowners try to use their money to help the poorer people in the area. Dorothea is interested in improving the housing of the poor, and Lydgate is interested in providing them with free medical care.

The tradesmen and manufacturers live in the town. They all know each other and are often related through marriage. The farmers also form part of this layer of society. These people work for a living and generally live very comfortably. The poorest people in the town are not really given a voice in the novel. There is some mention of the good works that Dorothea and Lydgate do, but the Middlemarch we see is mainly that of the landowners and the wealthier townspeople.

Each of the main families in the novel teaches us something about the layers of society in Middlemarch. The Brookes are landowners. Mr Brooke has two young nieces of marrying age. The family socialise with other similar families in the area and have very little direct contact with the tradesmen, manufacturers and farmers. It is no surprise, then, that the two girls marry other local landowners. Dorothea marries the ageing Casaubon and Celia marries Sir Chettam. In this way they hold on to their social position and build upon their family's wealth.

The Vincys are another important family in the novel. Mr Vincy is a manufacturer and his family is 'related to nearly all the respectable families in Middlemarch. Mr Vincy's sister was married to Mr Bulstrode, the rich banker. The Vincys were not as rich or as important as the Brookes but ... they were well-respected in the town.' Rosamund has ambitions to become more than a manufacturer's daughter. She hopes to use her looks to find a rich husband who will raise her position in society. This ambition was shared by many manufacturing families throughout England at the time.

The Garths are another important family who show yet another side of life in Middlemarch. Caleb Garth is a farm manager, he has worked for Mr Brooke and he will eventually train Peter Vincy in his trade. His daughter, Mary Garth, is the only example in the novel of a working woman. She works as a housekeeper for Peter Featherstone, a relative of the Vincys. Peter Vincy is in love with her. She teaches him to value honest, hard work and she helps him find a useful direction for his life.

There is very little contact between the Brookes and the other two families. 'Rich and important local families like the Chettams and Brookes, did not often meet the tradespeople of Middlemarch. They did not belong to the same level of society.' In fact Mr Brooke has no real idea of what the townspeople think. He does not realise that they have no respect for him and that they will never vote for him as their Member of Parliament. Dorothea is aware of their isolation and comments on it:

'It's so strange,' Dorothea said to her sister. 'We live so near these tradesmen and farming people, but we never speak to them. I visit the poor villagers in their cottages nearly every day, but I don't know the people of Middlemarch at all.'

Tertius Lydgate and Will Ladislaw are the only two characters who move easily between classes. Tertius Lydgate is from a good family (his uncle is a baronet) so he is welcome in the homes of the landowners who employ him as their personal doctor. He is also welcome in the homes of the wealthy tradesmen, the Vincys and the Bulstrodes, and he visits the poorer families in his position as doctor. He is almost the only character who relates easily to all levels of society.

Will Ladislaw also moves comfortably from one section of society to another. He has, for a long time, been supported by his cousin Edward Casaubon, but he feels no tie to his cousin's class. He works for Mr Brooke, but he often visits the Lydgates and becomes a good friend of both Tertius and Rosamund. He does not feel he belongs to any one social class thanks to his family background (his mother was an actress) and because Casaubon stops supporting him when he starts working with Mr Brooke. Will Ladislaw represents a new class and a new social awareness that will not reach Middlemarch for a very long time.

In Middlemarch we see a town that does not like change. The people of the town are not interested in new ideas and anyone who wants to change things finds themselves in trouble. Bulstrode becomes a landowner just as his secret past becomes known. He is almost chased from the town. Mr Brooke

tries to introduce new ideas and is laughed at. Lydgate and Dorothea both fail in their attempts to improve the lives of the poor. Lydgate is forced to give up his youthful ambitions and Dorothea moves to London where she can 'make the world a better place'.

The people who are successful in Middlemarch are the ones who do not try to change the social order. Peter Vincy and Mary Garth, and Celia and Sir James Chettam accept their positions, work hard and live long, happy lives. Both couples represent the values that govern Middlemarch and any town like it. Through their stories and those of the various other families and individuals, Eliot draws a detailed picture of life in a provincial town.