

Unit- v

The Mill On The Floss

Form and Content

The Mill on the Floss narrates the struggles of a girl and her family in the early years of Queen Victoria's reign over England. At that time, women's roles were strictly limited to housework and child rearing, and so girls—especially girls of Maggie's social class—were given only rudimentary educations. Maggie's story constitutes a protest against this kind of restriction; the reader is shown from the start that Maggie possesses a rich imagination and a keen mind but is supplied with no challenges or outlets for them. As a girl, she chafes constantly against the restrictions that are imposed upon her, preferring to read any books she can get her hands on to sewing her sampler, and always dirtying her clothes and disarranging her hair in her efforts to keep up with Tom. Worse, her sensitive and affectionate nature makes extremely painful to her the disapproval her extravagant flights of imagination, impatient desires, and "wild" behavior draw upon her from her mother, and especially from Tom, whom she adores. As a young woman, she achieves a certain serenity, despite her limiting occupation as a sewing teacher in a girls' school, but her desire for a wider life erupts into love for Stephen Guest, and the old conflict between passion and duty becomes very serious.

The novel presents Maggie's life in three periods: as a child of nine, as a girl of fourteen, and finally as a young woman of nineteen. In each period, the conflicts between her passions and her loyalty to family, and between her great potential and

her society's restrictions are most clearly delineated in the relationships she forms with the boys or men whom she loves: Tom, Philip, and Stephen. Each of these three relationships follows the pattern of transgression (by Maggie), harsh judgment (of Maggie), and extreme remorse (within Maggie). With Tom, the judgment and punishment are confined to the two of them, but later, with Philip, the entire family unites against her when the clandestine friendship is discovered. Finally, the entire society of St. Ogg's condemns her for her relationship with Stephen, even though she has refused to elope with him.

Interwoven with Maggie's story are the struggles of her father against "the lawyers" and Tom's struggles under a tutor who does not understand or respect him. In the last phase of the novel, Mr. Tulliver has died, so Maggie's story with Stephen is counterpointed by Tom's efforts to support his mother and sister, and to make a successful business career for himself. In all the stories, Eliot's message is clear: A fitting education would have prevented many of these characters' troubles.

The novel ends with Maggie's final conflict: Unable to find work because of her spoiled reputation, and thus resolving to leave St. Ogg's, she receives a passionate letter from Stephen begging her to come away and marry him. Knowing that giving in to these desires would cause her to betray both Lucy and Philip, she resolves to refuse Stephen and burns his letter. Just then, the river, swollen from a violent storm, floods the town. Maggie rows to the millhouse to save Tom, but they are drowned under a massive piece of machinery that the river brings down upon them.

The Mill on the Floss Summary

The Mill on the Floss opens with the unnamed narrator dreaming of Dorlcote Mill as she or he knew it years ago. At that time, [Mr. Tulliver](#), owner of the mill and its farm, has decided to send his son, Tom, away to school so that he can become something more than a miller and farmer. When Tom gets home for the summer, he learns that his younger sister Maggie forgot to feed his rabbits and they have all died, so he is furious with her. Maggie is a very bright girl with good intentions and a strong desire to please her brother, so this devastates her. As will happen frequently throughout their lives, Tom coldly holds her carelessness against her for a little while before forgiving her.

Tom's schooling at Mr. Stelling's begins. Tom finds the lessons largely unpleasant, as he is the only pupil and it is the kind of learning that he finds the most difficult. After the Christmas holiday, though, [Philip Wakem](#) joins him at King's Lorton to learn from Mr. Stelling. Philip is the son of [Mr. Wakem](#), a lawyer whom Mr. Tulliver detests, so Tom is prepared to dislike him. Tom is also disturbed by Philip's physical deformity. Philip is overly sensitive but an apt pupil, so he also has a problem with the brutish miller's son. The two reach a wary peace, however, especially when Maggie comes to visit, as Philip is greatly impressed with her intelligence and kind nature.

Two years later, Maggie goes away to school with her cousin Lucy, but is called home when Mr. Tulliver has lost his lawsuit against Mr. Pivart, a neighboring farmer represented by Mr. Wakem. The loss of the suit combined with his legal fees means he will lose the mill and be completely bankrupt. Right before Maggie's return, he learns that the mortgage on the farm has fallen into Mr. Wakem's hands, and this news on top of everything else causes him to lose his

senses. Maggie goes to Mr. Stelling's to deliver the news to Tom, who comes home with her.

There they find that Mr. Tulliver recognizes only Maggie, and a bailiff has come to sell off all of their household goods and furniture, which Mr. Tulliver had used as a security against one of his loans. Mrs. Tulliver turns to her sisters - Mrs. Pullet, Deane and Glegg - for help, but they are more interested in making their moral superiority known, and they only buy the goods that they would want anyway. Tom goes to his uncle Deane for advice on starting out in business so that he can help his family. [Mr. Deane](#) is somewhat discouraging, but he eventually finds Tom a starting position at Guest & Co., Mr. Deane's employer, and sets him up with lessons in bookkeeping.

Mrs. Tulliver goes to see Mr. Wakem to try to discourage him from buying the mill when it comes up at auction, but she inadvertently convinces him to do just that. Mr. Tulliver has been slowly improving, and when they tell him that Mr. Wakem now owns the mill and is willing to keep him on as manager, he agrees to do so even though he despises the idea of working under Mr. Wakem, since he believes he owes it to his wife, and he doesn't want to make his family have to move.

Mr. Tulliver's only focus now is on saving enough money to repay all of his remaining outstanding debts. Tom and Mrs. Tulliver agree this is the honorable thing to do, so Tom gives all of his earnings from his new job to this cause, and Mrs. Tulliver does everything she can to economize. [Bob Jakin](#) gives Maggie a pile of books as a gift, among which is a spiritual treatise which recommends self-renunciation as the path to peace. Maggie becomes convinced this is the only way she will be happy, but she goes at it with an egotistical zeal which is against the true nature of the renunciation.

Bob Jakin offers Tom (now 19) an investment opportunity that he takes with the help of Mr. and Mrs. Glegg, and he manages to quickly multiply his savings. Meanwhile, Philip Wakem meets Maggie on one of her walks, and pleads with her to meet with him regularly, secretly. She eventually agrees, and they do so for almost a year. Philip finally tells Maggie that he is in love with her, and she tells him that she can't imagine loving anyone more than she does him, but she could never marry him and risk hurting her father and brother so deeply.

Tom figures out that Maggie has been meeting Philip and tells her that if she ever sees or communicates with Philip again without Tom's permission, he will tell their father all about it, which will probably cause him to lose his sanity again. She accepts his terms, and Tom follows her to her next meeting with Philip. Tom is very cruel to him, and Maggie tells Philip she must end their friendship.

Tom manages to earn enough money with his investments to pay back all of Mr. Tulliver's debt. Mr. Tulliver is joyous, and decides to quit working for Mr. Wakem, but when he runs into him and tells him this, his anger gets the best of him and he ends up attacking Mr. Wakem with a horsewhip. This brings on a stroke of some sort for Mr. Tulliver, and he dies soon after, telling Tom that he should work to buy the mill back, and he should never forgive the Wakems.

Two years later, Maggie returns to St. Ogg's to stay with her cousin [Lucy Deane](#) after having worked at a school since her father's death. When Maggie learns of Lucy's friendship with Philip Wakem, she tells Lucy about her prior, forbidden relationship with him; Lucy begins to scheme ways to get the pair together. Maggie meets [Stephen Guest](#), who has been courting Lucy, and immediately is very attracted to him, and he to her. Though they both try to ignore their feelings, eventually they are overwhelmed by them, and so Maggie goes to

visit her aunt Moss to get away for a little. Stephen comes to her there and tells her that he loves her and that they have to be together. Though Maggie is tempted, she insists that she could never be happy with him because of the guilt she would feel about Lucy and Philip.

When Maggie returns to St. Ogg's, Lucy, trying to solidify the relationship between Maggie and Philip, arranges for them to be alone on a boat ride. Philip, though, is depressed because he has realized Maggie and Stephen have feelings for one another, so he arranges to have Stephen take his place, unintentionally leading to Stephen and Maggie being alone in the boat together. Stephen convinces Maggie to elope with him, so they leave the rowboat for a steamship to York. The next morning, however, when they dock, Maggie realizes she can't allow herself to get her happiness out of Philip and Lucy's hurt, so she tells Stephen she can't marry him after all, and heads back to St. Ogg's.

When Maggie returns to St. Ogg's five days later, everyone believes the worst of her, including Tom, who refuses to offer her a home with him. Mrs. Tulliver supports her, though, and together they lodge at childhood friend Bob Jakin's. A letter comes from Stephen to his father, absolving Maggie of guilt, but the damage to her reputation has been done. The town's clergyman, [Dr. Kenn](#), tries to help her and even gives her a job as governess to his children, but when rumors start to swirl about the two of them, he tells her it would be best if she moved to another town altogether.

Lucy, who has been unwell since the shock of Maggie and Stephen running off together, sneaks out one night to visit Maggie and tells her that once she is well again, she will come see her often. Maggie gets two letters, one from Philip telling her he doesn't blame her and wishes her to feel no guilt for his sake, and one from Stephen pleading with her to marry him. She resolves to turn him down for good.

She realizes the house is flooding and, after waking Bob and his family, gets into a boat to get to Dorlcote Mill. Mrs. Tulliver is safely out of town, but Tom is there and gets into the boat with her. They have a moment of unspoken resolution, but a large piece of debris comes right into their path and drowns them. Everyone else survives the flood and the siblings are buried next to one another.

OBJECTIVE TYPE QUESTION

1. Which of these reasons is *not* one of Mr. Tulliver's reasons for sending Tom on for more education?

- So that Tom can teach Maggie
- So that Tom can learn to write well
- So that Tom will have something else to do besides take over the mill from Mr. Tulliver
- So that Tom can help Mr. Tulliver with law documents and arbitrations
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2. What does Mr. Tulliver seek Mr. Riley's advice about?

- Maggie's uncanny intelligence
- Tulliver's dispute with Mr. Pivart over the Floss water
- Tom's education
- Tulliver's disputes with his wife's family, the Dodsons
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3. What book does Maggie show Mr. Riley that she is reading?

- *Aesop's Fables*
- *The Christian Year*
- *Pilgrim's Progress*

- *The History of the Devil*

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4. Why does Tom first get angry at Maggie when he comes home from school in Book First?

- Because she won't curl her hair
- Because she doesn't play fair at Heads or Tails
- Because she has forgotten to feed his rabbits and they've died
- Because she speaks badly of Lucy

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5. Why does Tom break off his friendship with Bob Jakin?

- Because Bob is better at trapping rabbits than Tom
- Because Bob is not intelligent
- Because Bob does not play fairly
- Because Bob has stolen Tom's pocketknife

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6. What impulsive action does Maggie take during the visit of her aunts and uncles in Book First?

- She falls in the mud
- She eats Tom's dessert
- She steps on a cake
- She cuts her own hair

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7. What do Mrs. Glegg and Mr. Tulliver have a disagreement over?

- Table linens
- Tom's education
- The 500 pounds Mrs. Glegg has lent Mr. Tulliver
- Maggie's behavior

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8. Why does Mr. Tulliver ultimately decide not to press his sister for the money she owes him?

- Because he thinks of Maggie dependent upon Tom after his own death
- Because he sees her eight children
- Because Mr. Moss convinces him to lay off
- Because another investment of his makes good
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9. What are Maggie's intentions towards the gypsies?

- To use them to make her family pity her
- To learn their language
- To teach them and be their queen
- To teach them how to cook
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10. What was St. Ogg's profession?

- A farmer
- A miller
- A priest
- A ferryman
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11. Who insists upon the repayment of the 500 pounds between Mr. Tulliver and Mrs. Glegg?

- Mrs. Glegg
- Mr. Tulliver
- Mrs. Tulliver
- Mr. Glegg
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12. Who is Tom's only playmate during his first term with Mr. Stelling?

- Poulter
- Bob Jakin
- Laura Stelling
- Yap
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13. Why is Christmas dreary after Tom's first term with Mr. Stelling?

- Because Maggie has become religiously ascetic
- Because Tom hates school
- Because the Dodsons refuse to visit
- Because Mr. Tulliver is preoccupied with litigation over the river water
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14. How does Philip Wakem first win Tom's respect?

- His singing
- His drawing skills
- His intelligence
- His self-assured demeanor
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15. What feature of Maggie's draws Philip to her?

- Her eyes
- Her hair
- Her linguistic prowess
- Her impetuosity
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16. What is Philip's first thought when Tom drops a sword on his own foot?

- That Tom deserved it
- That Tom might fear he will be lame for life
- That Tom is headstrong and stupid
- That warfare is wrong
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17. With whom does Maggie go to boarding school?

- Her mother
- Miss Guest
- Tom
- Lucy Deane
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18. What is Mr. Tulliver reading when he has a stroke?

- A decision against him in the court case over the water power
- A notice from his lawyer, Mr. Gore, that he is bankrupted
- A letter stating that the mortgage of the mill has been transferred to Wakem
- A letter from Maggie saying she will be home soon
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19. Why does Maggie become angry at her aunts and uncles during her father's illness?

- Because they are insulting Tom about the benefits of his education
- Because they will not offer to buy any of the family's furniture
- Because they are insulting to Mrs. Moss
- Because they have befriended Lawyer Wakem
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20. What causes Lawyer Wakem to buy the mill?

- The transference of Tulliver's mortgage to him
- Mrs. Tulliver's visit to him
- Mr. Riley's recommendation
- Tom's proud behavior
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21. What does Mr. Tulliver make Tom write in the family Bible?

- A notice that Maggie will never marry
- A notice that Wakem is not forgiven
- The occasion of Tom's repayment of the family debts
- The formal transference of power from Tulliver to Tom
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22. How does Tom manage to pay off the family debt?

- By saving his wages at Guest & Co.
- Through an entrepreneurial scheme with Bob Jakin
- By appealing to Mr. Glegg for money
- By selling his own goods

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23. What is Stephen Guest's relationship to Lucy Deane?

- They are engaged
- They are married
- They are courting
- They are friends

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24. What is the significance of Maggie's sewing?

- It shows that she is accomplished in female arts
- It shows her love of handicraft
- It signifies nothing
- It shows that she has been in financial difficulty

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25. Why does Maggie become angry when Stephen kisses her arm at the dance?

- Because Lucy might have seen
- Because Maggie is engaged to Philip
- Because he is drunk
- Because it shows that Stephen thinks lightly of her

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26. Which of the following is *not* a reason that Maggie decides to leave Stephen in Mudport and return to St. Ogg's?

- Because she feels her life with Stephen wouldn't be noble
- Because she feels the pull of the past on her
- Because she knows that St. Ogg's will never accept her as Stephen's wife
- Because she sympathizes with Lucy's and Philip's positions

Character List

- **Maggie Tulliver**

The protagonist of *The Mill on the Floss*. The novel tracks Maggie as she grows from an impetuous, clever child into a striking, unconventional young woman. Maggie's closest tie is to her brother Tom, and she seeks—and constantly feels denied—his approval and acceptance. Maggie is clever and enjoys books, the richness of intelligent conversation, and music, but her family's downfall lends her a quieter, troubled side that tends toward self-abnegation. With her dark skin, dark hair, and dark eyes, Maggie is often associated with the Tulliver side of the family, and, specifically her father's sister, Mrs. Moss

- **Tom Tulliver**

The Tullivers' older son. Tom has his own clear sense of duty, justice, and fairness, and these standards affect his action more so than emotion. Tom has affection for Maggie, but he dislikes her impetuous way of doing what she wants, assuming that she knows better than Tom. When Mr. Tulliver goes bankrupt, Tom must go to work at a young age and with little experience other than the Latin and Euclid he has learned in school. Tom brings the family out of debt and becomes a promising young worker at his uncle Deane's company, Guest & Co. Tom may be in love with Lucy Deane, but he focuses only on his work.

- **Elizabeth Tulliver** Maggie Tulliver's mother. Mrs. Tulliver is a dull-witted, stout, blond woman. Formerly a Miss Dodson, Mrs. Tulliver still maintains that the

respectable ways of the Dodson family are better than the ways of Mr. Tulliver. Mrs. Tulliver's mind works in small circles—she focuses mainly on tactile objects like the linens and the china. Her husband's bankruptcy makes her confused and listless, and all she can do is wonder what she has done to receive such bad luck. Mrs. Tulliver likes Tom more than Maggie as children, but she grows prouder of Maggie as Maggie grows tall, striking, and more demure.

- **Jeremy Tulliver**

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Maggie Tulliver's father. Mr. Tulliver works the mill on the Floss river, which is on land his family has held for generations. Mr. Tulliver is fond of Maggie, especially her cleverness, and he often takes her side in family quarrels. Mr. Tulliver's bankruptcy is, in part, the result of his own single-mindedness and pride. Associated with the older, provincial ways, Mr. Tulliver senses enough of the changing economic world around him to be puzzled by it. Tulliver is an affectionate man, who is soft with his daughter, wife, and sister, yet his bitterness toward Mr. Wakem consumes and changes him in the end.

- **Lucy Deane**

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The pretty, petite, blond cousin of Tom and Maggie. Lucy is genuinely good-hearted, thinking often of the happiness of others. She is also enough of a child of society life, though, that she pays heed to social conventions and to her own appearance.

- **Philip Wakem**

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The sensitive and intelligent son of Lawyer Wakem. Philip has had a hunched back since birth. Of small stature and with a pale face, Philip is often described as "womanly." Philip's love of art, music, and knowledge go some way toward counteracting the severe sadness he feels about his deformity. Philip first meets Maggie when he is at school with Tom. He falls in love with her the year that they meet in secret during Maggie's father's bankruptcy.

- **Lawyer Wakem**

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Lawyer Wakem is a powerful, and increasingly wealthy member of St. Ogg's society. He remembers his late wife lovingly and is very indulgent but close to his deformed son, Philip. Wakem holds strict ideas about class and money. He is scornful of the vindictive Mr. Tulliver.

- **Stephen Guest**

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Stephen Guest is courting Lucy Deane when we meet him but has not yet proposed marriage. He is the son of the senior partner of Guest & Co., where both Tom and Mr. Deane work. Stephen is handsome and self-assured. Though he cares for Lucy, and for the life they would have together, he falls unexpectedly in love with Maggie, drawn to her strikingly different qualities.

- **Bob Jakin**

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Bob Jakin was a childhood friend of Tom's. Though Tom rejected his friendship when they were children over an incident of cheating, Bob returns after Mr. Tulliver's bankruptcy to offer help to Maggie and Tom. Bob is a packman—a salesman who buys goods at one place and sells them at another.

- **Mr. and Mrs. Glegg**

Mrs. Glegg, formerly Miss Jane Dodson, acts as the leader of the Dodson sisters. Mrs. Glegg is loudly vocal regarding her disapprovals, which usually involve a violation of the Dodson way of doing something. Yet it is her same strict sense of respectability that allows Mrs. Glegg to stand by Maggie, when no one else will at the end of the novel. Mr. and Mrs. Glegg are miserly, though Mr. Glegg is more good-natured about thrift. Mr. Glegg tries to mediate his wife's ill temper and will stand up to her as well.

- **Mr. and Mrs. Deane**

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Mrs. Deane, formerly Miss Susan Dodson, is a pale, quieter, Dodson sister. Mrs. Deane does not say much, and she rehearses what she says beforehand. She dies before the end of the novel. Mr. Deane is a swiftly rising junior partner at Guest & Co. He focuses on business and profit-making more than family claims. Their daughter is Lucy.

- **Mr. and Mrs. Pullet**

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Mrs. Pullet, formerly Miss Sophie Dodson, is the closest Dodson sister to Mrs. Tulliver. They share a love of fine household goods. Mr. Pullet is a gentleman farmer, and the couple were originally the most wealthy of the Dodson family, until Mr. Deane began rising in the business world. Mr. Pullet does not have much to say for himself. He covers for this fact by sucking on peppermints.

- **Luke Moggs**

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Luke Moggs works for Mr. Tulliver. He is the miller at the mill on the Floss. Luke is practically a family member, and he sits by Mr. Tulliver's sickbed.

- **Mr. Riley**

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Mr. Riley is the auction manager in St. Ogg's. Mr. Tulliver looks up to him as a high class and full of wisdom and intelligence, but Mr. Riley is more likely middle class and not entirely full of wisdom. Mr. Riley has died by the middle of the novel.

- **Mr. Stelling**

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Mr. Stelling is the clergyman tutor of Tom Tulliver and, later, Philip Wakem. Stelling wants to rise in the world and lives somewhat beyond his current means. He teaches exactly as he was taught, with Latin and Euclid. He doesn't have the imagination or the open-mindedness to help Tom learn in other ways.

- **Dr. Kenn**

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Dr. Kenn is the stern, but charitable, minister of St. Ogg's

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- **Mr. and Mrs. Moss**

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Margaret Moss, Mr. Tulliver's sister—and "Aunt Gritty" to Tom and Maggie—is a patient, loving woman. She is especially fond of Maggie. She has eight children,

and the family is very poor. Mr. Tulliver did not want Margaret to marry Mr. Moss, and Tulliver is still cross about this. Mr. Moss does not have much character, mainly because he must work too much.

- **Mr. Pivart**

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Mr. Pivart, who lives down the Floss, begins a dispute with Mr. Tulliver over the river water.

- **Kezia**

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Kezia is the Tullivers' servant.

- **Mr. Gore**

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Gore is Mr. Tulliver's lawyer.

- **Mr. Poulter**

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Mr. Poulter is brought in by Mr. Stelling to give Tom exercise. Mr. Poulter drinks and talks about the war in which he fought.

- **the Miss Guests**

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The Miss Guests (there are two) are Stephen Guest's sisters. They are not very attractive and are snobbi

---All the Best -----
