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Reflections:

*A Student Response Journal for...*

# *The Good Earth*

*by Pearl Buck*

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*The Good Earth*

## **To The Teacher**

In order to allow the teacher maximum flexibility in his or her approach, we have grouped the prompts by sections. The teacher may, therefore, assign specific prompts or allow the students to select one or more prompts from each section

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## *Response Journal*

### **To The Student**

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.



\_\_\_\_\_

# Response Sheet

Date\_\_\_\_\_

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## CHAPTER 1

1. As the novel opens, Wang Lung's sense of gender roles is clear as he prepares for the arrival of his bride. Make a list of household duties that you feel are female responsibilities and those that you consider male responsibilities. Why do you think certain roles are gender-specific?
2. As Wang Lung walks to the House of Hwang, he purchases special foods and visits a barber. He also worries about the appearance of his bride. Imagine you are going to be married. What special preparations and/or purchases would you need to make your wedding day special?
3. O-lan stands submissively as the Ancient Mistress relieves her of her duties and describes her as "a good slave, although somewhat slow and stupid," as well as commenting on her lack of beauty. Imagine you are O-lan. Write a diary entry revealing how you feel about how the Ancient Mistress has described you.
4. Wang Lung's first days with O-lan are characterized by a mixture of pride and awkward silence. Contrast the marriages in the novel with those of today. Which method do you think is more likely to bring happiness? Why?
5. Throughout Chapter One, Wang Lung shows great respect and admiration for his father even though they do not always agree. Describe a conflict you have had with an adult in which you failed to show respect. Do you think a more respectful attitude would have helped in resolving the conflict? Why or why not?

## **CHAPTERS 2 - 3**

6. Wang Lung and O-lan spend many hours working the soil, “this earth which formed their home and fed their bodies and made their gods.” For Wang Lung, the land represents the past, present, and the future. It defines his culture. What is your concept of American culture? What ideals or practices do you think define you as an American?
7. O-lan hopes to dress her firstborn son in fine clothes when she presents him to the Ancient Mistress. Once a slave and now a wife, O-lan takes great pride in planning for the baby. What are some accomplishments that have given you a sense of pride? Make a list of at least six things you are proud of and explain why each one gives you pride.
8. Wang Lung exclaims, “We shall buy a good basketful of eggs and dye them all red for the village. Thus will everyone know I have a son!” What customs are practiced today to announce births? Do they make sense to you?
9. In Chapter Three, O-lan is presented as a woman possessing great inner strength and courage. Write a simile that celebrates someone’s strength of character. You may need to look up “simile” in the dictionary.



## **CHAPTERS 4-6**

10. With a strong wife, a healthy son, and a good crop, Wang Lung worries that his life is too fortunate and says, "The air and the earth were filled with malignant spirits who could not endure the happiness of mortals, especially of such as are poor." To ward off possible bad luck, Wang Lung burns incense in the little family temple. What are some common superstitions today? What do people do to keep misfortune from coming their way?
11. Wang Lung does not become friendly with his neighbors because he fears they will begin borrowing things from him. Does your family have good relations with your neighbors? Why or why not?
12. As the new year approaches, Wang Lung decorates the house with red paper as a symbol of prosperity and good luck. Write a paragraph about how you feel the perfect New Year should be celebrated.
13. When Wang Lung and O-lan take the baby to meet the Ancient Mistress, it is extremely important to them that they appear prosperous. In other words, "they dress to impress." Are people judged by the way they dress? Why do you think some clothing styles are more popular than others?
14. Write a letter to your school newspaper explaining your thoughts on the emphasis teenagers place on fashion.
15. Wang Lung states that "Land is one's flesh and blood." Clearly, he considers land to be his most prized possession. What is your most prized possession? What would you be willing to sacrifice in order to keep it?

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*Response Journal*

16. Wang Lung calls his new parcel of land “a sign and a symbol.” What does the purchase of the land symbolize to him? What do you feel about having land to own? Is it important?
  
17. Wang Lung’s reaction to the news that O-Lan has borne another son is markedly different from that of his firstborn son. Do you find that first-born children today have advantages over their younger siblings? Explain your answer in a note to a child who complains that the first-born has all the advantages.

## **CHAPTERS 7-9**

18. Frustrated, Wang Lung openly criticizes his uncle, for which he is slapped and reminded of the custom against correcting his elders. Do you agree with this custom? Relate an incident when correcting an elder could have proven beneficial, either from real life, a book, or a movie.
19. When Wang Lung's third child, a daughter, is born O-lan says she is "not worth mentioning" and Wang Lung sees the birth as an "evil omen." How do these statements affect you? Why do you think girls carry low social value in China, even today?
20. After a season of drought, Wang Lung secretly purchases more land. Think of a secret you have kept. What were your reasons for doing so? Explain them in a personal diary entry.
21. After being robbed, Wang Lung states, "They cannot take the land away from me...it is mine." This is a moment of strength for Wang Lung in the face of very bad circumstances. Write about a time when you or someone you know remained strong during a time of great misfortune. Make sure you explain whether you agree with that person's decision.
22. When Wang Lung obtains a little food, he feeds his father before he feeds his children. Imagine your family is starving and you do not have enough food to sustain everyone, but you have enough for one person besides yourself. Who would you feed first and why?
23. O-lan kills her fourth child, a girl, moments after she is born. Write a letter to O-lan and give her some advice.

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*Response Journal*

24. It is implied that Wang Lung's uncle and his wife resort to cannibalism to keep from starving to death during the famine. Write a letter to the editor of the China Times explaining your opinion on the necessity of staying alive by any means or on the horrible idea of eating a human being.
25. Despite starvation, Wang Lung and O-lan refuse to sell their land. Imagine you are faced with the same situation. Would you sell your land for food? Why or why not?

## **Chapters 10-14**

26. Wang Lung's weakened family is amazed by the fire wagon that will take them south to the city. What modern technologies amaze you? What do you think are the five most important technological developments of all time? List a one-sentence reason for each choice.
27. Passersby ignore the poverty of Wang Lung's family as they huddle beside a wall in the city. Is this typical of people's behavior toward the homeless today? How would you react if you saw a family living in a tent outside your favorite shopping mall?
28. The guard at the food distribution center answers Wang Lung's question of why people give to charity by saying "It is the rich and gentry of the town who do it, and some do it for a good deed for the future, that by saving lives they may get merit in heaven, and some do it for righteousness that men may speak well of them." Why do people donate to charities today? Do you think that charitable contributions really help those less fortunate? Why or why not?
29. Wang Lung rents a rickshaw and becomes the equivalent of a modern-day taxi driver. As a newcomer to the city, he must learn the ways of the land and the values of the people. Imagine you are starting a new school. What non-academic lessons would you be expected to learn in order to succeed in your new environment?
30. Wang Lung's second son proudly presents the family with meat he has stolen. Wang Lung beats him and refuses to eat it. Do you think Wang Lung was correct to punish his son? Is stealing ever justifiable? Write a paragraph explaining your answer.

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## *Response Journal*

31. Wang Lung feels that his family is caught in a net of poverty and degradation as long as they live in the city. Do you think poor American families face the same situations today? Write up a proposal for a modern family suggesting sensible and legal ways to break the poverty cycle.
32. O-Lan and Wang Lung misinterpret both the religious tract they receive from the Christian missionary and the political tract they receive from the Communists. Create a flyer that effectively communicates your opinion on a modern political or religious issue. Make sure that you understand what should go on a flyer.
33. Wang Lung narrowly avoids being taken by the soldiers in order to help a war effort he knows nothing about. Imagine you have been taken away from your family to serve in the Army. Write a letter to a loved one explaining what has happened to you.?
34. What do you consider to be your “gate of peace”?
35. Wang Lung and O-Lan take part in a raid similar to that they suffered before moving to the city. Wang Lung refuses to steal merchandise but takes gold from the rich man who was left behind, even threatening his life. What would you have done in this situation if you were Wang Lung?

## **CHAPTERS 15-16**

36. Ching weeps when Wang Lung gives him seeds to start replanting, and a lifelong friendship is sealed. Construct a list explaining what qualities make a longstanding friendship.
37. Do you have a friend now that you can visualize being your friend twenty years from now? What experiences do you predict you will share with this friend?
38. With their newfound wealth, Wang Lung and O-lan make several small home improvements. Imagine you are given \$500 to make improvements in your room. What items would you buy? Make a collage from catalog clippings of the items you would like and be sure not to spend more money than your budget allows.
39. After Wang Lung discovers O-lan's jewels, he demands all of her treasure except two pearls. He then buys three hundred acres of prime farmland from the House of Hwang, ensuring a secure future for the family. In today's society, what items make a person feel secure? Why?

## **CHAPTERS 17-19**

40. As Wang Lung amasses land and wealth, he sends his oldest son to school because he feels he needs a family representative capable of reading contracts. What aspects of education today do you think are the most important? What parts do you feel are least important? Explain your position.
41. Wang Lung chooses a school for his sons based on the teacher's reputation for flogging inattentive students. Should children be physically disciplined in school? What punishments, if any, do you think are most effective for kids who do not follow school rules?
42. Wang Lung complains about O-lan's physical appearance. Imagine you are O-lan and write a diary entry in response to Wang Lung's complaints. Remember that no one is supposed to read your diary but you, so be honest about how you feel.
43. In Wang Lung's time, foot binding was a painful method of altering the body for the sake of what some call "beauty." What do women today to be considered more beautiful? What do men do to be considered more handsome?
44. Obsessed with Lotus, Wang Lung endangers his family's well being with silly spending. He also neglects the management of his property and changes his appearance and manner of dress. Discuss how adolescents alter their personalities for the sake of love. Why do you think this happens?



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*The Good Earth*

## **CHAPTERS 20-23**

45. An angered O-lan cries out to Wang Lung, "I have borne you sons...I have borne you sons." Write a poem of at least ten lines that expresses the anguish and betrayal that O-lan feels.
46. Wang Lung describes his obsession with Lotus as a fever or sickness. How do you feel about the choices Wang Lung has made regarding the concubine? Do you see his actions as a sign of strength or weakness of character?
47. Wang Lung has amassed enough property to become a respected member of the town. His advice is sought in a number of civic and political matters. Imagine you have just been elected to the position of city planner for your hometown. Write an editorial for the local paper listing at least three improvements you would propose for your area. Be sure to include arguments why these proposals are necessary.
48. Wang Lung beats his oldest son for skipping school. Do you think this punishment is appropriate? What expectations or rules are maintained in your family? What consequences do you think would be most effective in helping you live by these rules? Which rules in your family would you want to change? Why?
49. When Wang Lung attempts to oust his uncle's family from the household, his uncle reveals that he is a member of a gang of thieves. Wang Lung feels helpless in this situation. Recall a time when a bully confronted you or someone you know. How was the conflict resolved?

## **CHAPTERS 24-27**

50. Wang Lung's eldest son wishes to continue his education in the city rather than staying on the farm with his family. Wang Lung is incensed by his request. Imagine you are Wang Lung and write a letter to your son stating the reasons why you think he should remain at home. OR Pretend you are the eldest son and write a letter stating your position.
51. Wang Lung decides that his second son should become a merchant. Toward what careers are your parents or guardians guiding you? Do you feel pressured by their influence, or do you appreciate their guidance? Do your own goals differ from the goals your parents have set for you? Include these answers in a letter to the people who are trying to steer you toward a career.
52. When Wang Lung shows concern for his younger daughter's pain as she undergoes the foot binding process, she responds, "...my mother said I was not to weep aloud because you are too kind and weak for pain and you might say to leave me as I am, and then my husband would not love me even as you do not love her." Do you think O-lan loves Wang Lung? Why or why not?

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*The Good Earth*

53. When the doctor examines the ailing O-lan, he requests, first five hundred, then five thousand pieces of silver to “guarantee her recovery,” although he knows she will “die.” His request is known as a “euphemism,” because he really knows her condition will eventually kill her, but he does not want to use the word “die.” List several euphemisms used in modern society. Why, in your opinion do people use euphemisms to avoid certain words? Make a list of at least a dozen euphemisms; across from the list write the word that is being replaced. Follow the form below:

**EUPHEMISM**

**REPLACES**

Passed away

died

## **Chapters 28-32**

54. One of O-lan's dying wishes is to see her eldest son married. How does the wedding of Wang Lung contrast to that of his son? Identify three modern American wedding rituals. How do they symbolize the unity of man and wife?
55. O-lan's last words are "Beauty cannot bear a man sons." What does this reveal about her personality? An epitaph means the words written on a tombstone. Write two epithets for O-lan: one from Wang Lung's point of view, and the other from your own point of view.
56. Wang Lung and his son plot to rid themselves of their uncle's tyranny by providing his (the uncle's) family with enough opium to addict them to the drug. Do some research and prepare a brief report explaining the physical and mental results of opium addiction.
57. Wang Lung is both astonished and impressed by his second son's request for a wife. What special qualities will you look for in a mate? Write a personal ad for a newspaper detailing what you want in a spouse. Avoid any sexuality in the ad, and make it more than 50 words long.
58. When the son of the uncle announces he will join the war efforts in the north, Wang Lung is relieved. Why do you suppose people join the military today? What advantages does the military offer young people?
59. Wang Lung mourns the death of his servant Ching even more than that of his own father as "he has ever stood guard to me against evil." Although he was a servant, Ching was also Wang Lung's best friend. Describe your best friend. What qualities make that friend important to you?

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*The Good Earth*

60. Imagine you are one of Wang Lung's sons and write a friendly letter to him expressing the following:
- A. As the oldest son: why you wish to refurbish the Great House
  - B. As the middle son: why you think your older brother is squandering the family fortune
  - C. As the youngest son: why you do not wish to become a farmer
61. Wang Lung "comforts" his evil uncle by placing a coffin within view of his uncle's deathbed. Write a journal entry, as the uncle, who would be well enough to write, explaining your feelings about this coffin and where it is placed.

## **Chapters 33-34**

62. Pear Blossom becomes Wang Lung's new concubine even though many years separate them. Recall some old/young marriages you have knowledge of or have heard about in the press. Do you think true love can exist between couples whose ages vary so greatly? Back up your opinion.
  
63. Wang Lung "bought a little bundle of white poisonous stuff at the medicine shop...and he would give it to his fool to eat when he was near death." He believes she will be better off dead than with no father to care for her. Wang Lung's plan for his mentally disabled daughter might be called euthanasia, a mercy killing. Explain your feelings about euthanasia in an editorial to a newspaper.

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*The Good Earth*

**WRAP - UP**

64. Which character in the book do you most admire? Why?
65. Which character in the novel do you consider to be the weakest? Why?
66. You learn that your school board is going to drop *The Good Earth* from the reading list because they believe it is no longer relevant for today's student. Write a letter that tries to persuade the board to continue to allow students to study this novel.
67. What do you think of the title of the story? Did you understand its significance? Can you come up with a better title?
68. If you had a chance to speak with the author of this novel, are there any questions you would ask Pearl Buck or comments you would make?
69. If you were to tell a friend what you think the message of this novel is, what would it be?

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## Response Journal

70. *The Good Earth* is a serious novel. You are probably aware of other novels that you have read which have a tone of emphasis other than seriousness. Below is a list of these. Number your preference as to which qualities in a novel you prefer. When you finish numbering them, give reasons for why you have numbered your first and last preference the way you did.

### Type of Novel

- |                       |                          |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Serious            | 6. About teenagers       |
| 2. Humorous           | 7. Biographies of heroes |
| 3. Historical setting | 8. Science fiction       |
| 4. About the sea      | 9. About murders         |
| 5. Modern day setting | 10. Other (name it)      |



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*The Good Earth*

**TEST**

1. One reason Wang Lung looks forward to marriage is that
  - A. he will no longer be lonely.
  - B. he will no longer have to perform household chores.
  - C. he will be able to move away from his father's house.
  - D. his bride is reputed to be of great beauty.
2. O-lan holds what position in the House of Hwang?
  - A. Kitchen slave
  - B. Lady-in-waiting
  - C. Laundress
  - D. Concubine
3. Although O-lan is a faithful, hardworking wife, Wang Lung is disappointed in her lack of
  - A. cooking skills.
  - B. beauty.
  - C. conversation.
  - D. personality.
4. Throughout the novel, the color red is a symbol of
  - A. death.
  - B. happiness.
  - C. wisdom.
  - D. fortune.
5. After Wang Lung and O-lan present their son to the Old Mistress at the House of Hwang, they pretend that the child is a girl because they believe
  - A. robbers are lurking near the path.
  - B. they can trick the Old Mistress out of an inheritance.
  - C. evil spirits will take the child from them.
  - D. baby girls are better omens than boys.

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*Response Journal*

6. Throughout the novel, Wang Lung shows
  - A. little trust in the gods.
  - B. great faith in the gods.
  - C. a complete lack of religious conviction.
  - D. reverence for Buddha.
7. Although it is in an inconvenient location, Wang Lung buys a parcel of land from the House of Hwang. What is his motivation for the purchase?
  - A. Pride
  - B. Greed
  - C. Revenge
  - D. Lust
8. During the first famine, Wang Lung's house is robbed by
  - A. members of the Red Shirts.
  - B. his uncle.
  - C. soldiers.
  - D. villagers.
9. What atrocity is Wang Lung's uncle's family suspected of during the famine?
  - A. Cannibalism
  - B. Extortion
  - C. Polygamy
  - D. Murder
10. Which mode of transportation saves the family from sure death as they try to escape the famine-stricken region?
  - A. Rickshaw
  - B. Oxcart
  - C. Train
  - D. Steamboat

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*The Good Earth*

11. Wang Lung believes that as long as he possesses his land, he will maintain his
    - A. lifestyle.
    - B. dignity.
    - C. marriage.
    - D. faith.
  12. When living in the city, what job does Wang Lung hold?
    - A. Rickshaw runner
    - B. Messenger
    - C. Rice kitchen worker
    - D. Fisherman
  13. What do Wang Lung and O-lan do with the flyers they receive from Christian missionaries and Communist supporters?
    - A. Frame them on the walls of their tent
    - B. Take them to the temple to be read
    - C. Cook them into their stew
    - D. Use them as shoe soles
  14. After the famine, what does Wang Lung use to purchase more land?
    - A. The jewels O-lan stole from the Great House in the city
    - B. Credit on the next season's rice crop
    - C. The proceeds from the sale of his oldest daughter
    - D. The silver Wang Lung stole during the revolt
  15. The rear escape door in homes of the rich was called what?
    - A. Back Door
    - B. Escape Gate
    - C. Gate of Peace
    - D. Door of Fortune
  16. Who becomes Wang Lung's loyal servant upon his return home?
    - A. Liu
    - B. Ching
    - C. Lotus
    - D. Cuckoo
-

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*Response Journal*

17. As Wang Lung becomes prosperous, what does he expect his middle son to become?
- A. A farmer
  - B. A merchant
  - C. A soldier
  - D. A teahouse proprietor
18. Who is Lotus?
- A. Wang Lung's concubine
  - B. Wang Lung's aunt
  - C. Wang Lung's kitchen servant
  - D. Wang Lung's daughter
19. Before she dies, O-lan blames *which* character by saying, "I have been a wife, but you have always been a slave"?
- A. Lotus
  - B. Pear Blossom
  - C. Cuckoo
  - D. Ching
20. Why does Wang Lung allow his uncle to remain a part of his household?
- A. Wang Lung must show respect for his uncle.
  - B. His uncle threatens to have his gang of robbers attack.
  - C. Wang Lung's father demands it.
  - D. O-lan wishes for the cousins to be raised together.
21. What does Wang Lung's youngest son wish to become?
- A. A merchant
  - B. A soldier
  - C. A farmer
  - D. A barber
22. To escape the tyranny of the uncle, the Wangs move to
- A. the former House of Hwang.
  - B. the home O-lan raided in the city.
  - C. Ching's farm.
  - D. the teahouse.

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23. How does Wang Lung plan to provide for the daughter he calls “the fool” after his death?
- A. He will leave her in the care of his eldest son.
  - B. He will send her to an asylum.
  - C. He will poison her.
  - D. He will sell her into slavery.
24. Wang Lung’s eldest son can best be characterized as
- A. a spendthrift.
  - B. a vain man.
  - C. an ambitious entrepreneur.
  - D. a valiant warrior.
25. What do Wang Lung’s sons plan to do after his death?
- A. Refurbish the farmhouse
  - B. Open a new teahouse in town
  - C. Sell the land
  - D. Donate their inheritances to the Communist Party

## **Test Student Answer Sheet**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. \_\_\_\_\_

14. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

15. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

16. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

17. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

18. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

19. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

20. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

21. \_\_\_\_\_

9. \_\_\_\_\_

22. \_\_\_\_\_

10. \_\_\_\_\_

23. \_\_\_\_\_

11. \_\_\_\_\_

24. \_\_\_\_\_

12. \_\_\_\_\_

25. \_\_\_\_\_

13. \_\_\_\_\_

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## *Response Journal*

### **An Annotated Bibliography on Response Journals**

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**Test  
Answer Key**

1. \_\_B\_\_

2. \_\_A\_\_

3. \_\_B\_\_

4. \_\_D\_\_

5. \_\_C\_\_

6. \_\_A\_\_

7. \_\_A\_\_

8. \_\_D\_\_

9. \_\_C\_\_

10. \_\_A\_\_

11. \_\_B\_\_

12. \_\_A\_\_

13. \_\_D\_\_

14. \_\_D\_\_

15. \_\_C\_\_

16. \_\_B\_\_

17. \_\_B\_\_

18. \_\_A\_\_

19. \_\_C\_\_

20. \_\_B\_\_

21. \_\_B\_\_

22. \_\_A\_\_

23. \_\_C\_\_

24. \_\_B\_\_

25. \_\_C\_\_



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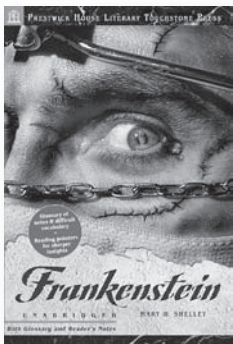
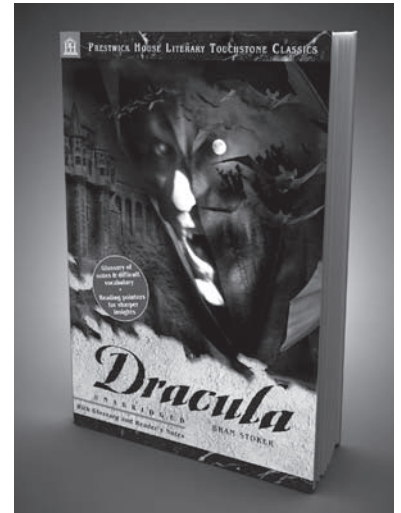
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