

Discussion Questions

- 1 The novel and film begin with a similar line, “My Uncle Daniel’s just like your uncle, if you’ve got one—only he has one weakness. He loves happiness [in the novel, “society”] and sometimes he gets carried away.” How do you think Uncle Daniel would define “happiness”? How would Edna Earle and Bonnie Dee Peacock Ponder define it? How do these different definitions conflict with each other?
- 2 What does it mean in this story to be a Ponder? A Peacock? Do you think that in the world of Clay, Mississippi, a Peacock can ever become a true Ponder, as Bonnie Dee tries to do? Do you think this class structure exists in our society today? If so, how?
- 3 Describe the relationship between Edna Earle and her Uncle Daniel. How does Bonnie Dee threaten that relationship? Of the three, with whom do you sympathize the most? How do the novel and the film manage to make that character both comic and sympathetic at the same time?
- 4 Critics have commented that much of Welty’s work shows the difficulty of balancing one’s sense of self as an individual against the expectations of one’s family and community. Is this tension present in the characters in *The Ponder Heart*? If so, how?
- 5 Think of all the various definitions of “heart.” Which ones seem to have been used the most in the film? Who do you think has the most “heart” in the story? Why? Considering the various uses of both “ponder” and “heart” throughout the film and novel, why do you think Welty chose as her title *The Ponder Heart*?
- 6 In the film, the interaction between Uncle Daniel and Intrepid Elsie Fleming takes several scenes. In the novel it is described in two paragraphs. What does the filmmaker accomplish by amplifying this scene and putting it at the beginning of the film? What does it help you learn about Uncle Daniel, the Ponders, and their town?
- 7 These following lines, spoken by Edna Earle in the novel, are not in the film. Yet the meaning of the lines are illustrated in the film in many ways. How does the film show this rather than tell what Edna Earle says?

I don't know if you can measure love at all. But Lord knows there's a lot of it, and seems to me from all the studying I've done over Uncle Daniel—and he loves more people than you and I put together ever will—that if the main one you've set your heart on isn't speaking for your love, or is out of your reach some way, married or dead, or plain nitwitted, you've still got that love banked up somewhere. What Uncle Daniel did was just bestow his all around quick—men, women, and children. Love! There's always somebody wants it. Uncle Daniel knew that. He's smart in a way you aren't, child.

- 8 The movie ends without showing what happens to Uncle Daniel's position in Clay after his trial. How do you think he is treated in town after he gives all his money away? Why? How does Welty describe what happens? How similar is it to what you predicted? Why do you think the filmmakers chose to leave it out?

The Ponder Heart, by Eudora Welty, was first published in 1954. For more about the MASTERPIECE film *The Ponder Heart* and related features, visit <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/americancollection/ponder/index.html>. For *The Ponder Heart Teacher's Guide* go to <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/americancollection/ponder/tguide.html>.

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