

Character Sketch of Paul, Gertrude and Miriam

Paul Morel

Paul Morel is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Morel and the brother of William, Annie, and Arthur. Paul is a serious and reflective child and Mrs. Morel worries about him extensively because she feels he is fragile and because he is prone to “fits of depression.” However, despite Mrs. Morel’s fears, Paul grows into a vigorous and intelligent young man. Although he is not as athletic as Mr. Morel or William, Paul enjoys physical activity and likes to “lose himself” in it. He loves to be outdoors in nature and feels a sensuous connection to the natural world. He is very interested in art and ideas and is a talented painter. He is successful and popular at work and is attractive to women. However, his tendency towards abstract thought and his introspective temperament sometimes lead Paul into trouble. Although he is a deep thinker, he is not able to easily recognize his emotions or understand what he wants or needs from a situation. He is accidentally cruel to his lovers, Miriam and Clara, because he cannot decide what he wants from them and he tends to be self-absorbed and think about himself before he considers their feelings. He feels uncomfortable about sex and is deeply ashamed of his desires. This often makes him hate his lovers because he blames them for causing his shame. Paul is extremely close to Mrs. Morel, especially after William’s death, and wishes that he and his mother were not related so they could be lovers rather than mother and son. He plans his life and career around pleasing and supporting his mother and prioritizes her over his girlfriends, of whom she is very jealous. Paul is devastated by his mother’s death and loses all interest in life or his own future. He feels that his mother was his real companion and has no desire to go on without her. Despite this, however, Paul is a determined character and his love of physicality and the material world push him to survive even when he is left desolate at the novel’s conclusion.

Gertrude Morel

Mrs. Morel is the wife of Mr. Morel and the mother of William, Paul, Annie and Arthur. She is born into a middle-class family and marries Mr. Morel after she meets him at a country dance. Mrs. Morel is reserved and religious, but she is also an extremely practical and determined woman. Although she dislikes drink and is generally ascetic in her lifestyle, she is capable of passion and sensuality and this leads her to marry Mr. Morel, to whom she is instantly attracted. Mrs. Morel strives to make the best of her poverty and is proud and prepared to defend herself when her husband is abusive to her. She is never broken down by his temper, although he makes her fiercely angry—throughout their marriage she tends to dominate and overshadow him, as she is really the strongest of the pair. Mrs. Morel loves her children deeply and is genuinely well meaning towards them. Unfortunately, the strength of her love for her sons leads her to become

jealous and possessive and she inadvertently restricts them as they try to develop their own lives; they have such a strong relationship with her that they feel guilty if they share their affection with another woman. Miriam, Paul's long-term girlfriend, often feels that she must compete with Mrs. Morel and that he is under his mother's influence. Overall, Mrs. Morel's life is hard and unhappy, and the reader gets the sense that she has not been given the opportunity to use her full potential. She is an intelligent, organized and industrious woman, but the restrictions of her class and gender mean that Mrs. Morel misses out on opportunities in work and education that later generations of women would benefit from.

Miriam Leivers

Miriam is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Leivers and the long-term girlfriend of Paul Morel. Paul meets Miriam when she is fourteen and continues to spend time with her into her early twenties. Miriam is a deeply self-conscious and spiritual girl. She is extremely religious, loves to feel pure, and is afraid of physical sensation and experience. Her emotions tend to be very extreme and close to the surface and she has trouble making light of situations and being friendly and familiar with people. She reads a lot and resents her life on the farm. She wants to have an education and has an extremely romantic view of herself as a literary heroine who has been trapped in a life of manual labor. She and Paul have a deep intellectual connection and spend many hours together discussing books, art, and religion. Although she is in love with Paul, Miriam despises sexual contact and disapproves of physical love outside of marriage, which she is afraid of and feels too young for. She views sex as a "sacrifice" and is willing to sacrifice herself for Paul, in order to give him pleasure. Throughout her relationship with Paul, Miriam is convinced that Paul is the best and most soulful version of himself when he is with her. She feels confident that, in the end, Paul will choose her over the other women who compete for his affections: his mother and, later, Clara Dawes. At times, Miriam tries to manipulate Paul into staying with her, but generally she is confused by his erratic behavior towards her and is hurt by his frequent rejections. Despite this, Miriam is stronger than Paul and often dislikes him because he is so easily swayed by his mother's opinion. Miriam, on the other hand, genuinely thinks for herself. She is hated by Mrs. Morel, who feels that she would "suck the soul" from her son, and by Annie and Clara, who find her insipid and needy.