# Teaching *Metzerott, Shoemaker*

## These resources may be used to develop lesson plans, structure class discussion, or provide prompts for student note-taking as they read *Metzerott, Shoemaker.*

## Materials Needed

* This activity uses material found on [The Woman's Literary Club of Baltimore Archive](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/), specifically those relating to the [Katharine Pearson Woods Exhibit](https://timemapper.okfnlabs.org/anon/dgust7-kpwoods) on the [Projects](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/projects.html) page of the site:
  + “Katharine Pearson Woods, *Metzerott, Shoemaker,* and the Women’s Literary Club of Baltimore” Timemapper exhibit on the Katharine Pearson Woods [project page](https://timemapper.okfnlabs.org/anon/dgust7-kpwoods), with biographical information about Woods, an overview of her career, and the reception of *Metzerott, Shoemaker*
  + [Digital edition of *Metzerott, Shoemaker*](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/metzerott_formatted)
* Historical contexts such as Christian Socialism and late-nineteenth century labor movements are likely to be unfamiliar to students. These materials may provide some useful background that will help students navigate some of the theological and economic discussions between Clare, Frederick Richards, and Bryan McClosky in Books 2 and 3, as well as the general themes of economic inequality and class politics that are at the core of the novel:
  + [Christian Socialism](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christian-Socialism) at Britannica.com: a very brief, general overview
  + [Socialism](https://www.history.com/topics/industrial-revolution/socialism) at History.com: a history of socialism as a political and economic theory, with information about [Five 19th-Century Utopian Communities in the US](https://www.history.com/news/5-19th-century-utopian-communities-in-the-united-states) that may be interesting to compare to Woods’s portrayal of “Price’s.”
  + [The Haymarket Square Riot](https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/the-haymarket-square-riot) at History.com: this 1886 labor uprising bears significant resemblances to the riot at the end of *Metzerott, Shoemaker*
* Historical maps of Wheeling, West Virginia (on which Mickleburg is modeled) and primary and secondary sources relating to the German community of Wheeling are available on the [Resources](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/woods_resources.html) page of the Katharine Pearson Woods project.
* Students will need computers or tablets to access the online edition outside of class; tablets and laptops for students in class is preferable, but optional. Instructors may provide guided exploration of the Timemapper exhibit via a computer and projector if needed.

## Preparatory Work

* The instructor should familiarize themselves with “Katharine Pearson Woods, *Metzerott, Shoemaker,* and the Women’s Literary Club of Baltimore” Timemapper exhibit on the Katharine Pearson Woods [project page](https://timemapper.okfnlabs.org/anon/dgust7-kpwoods) and the [Digital edition of *Metzerott, Shoemaker*](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/metzerott_formatted)*,* as well as the historical contexts.
* Students should read *Metzerott, Shoemaker* in advance of class discussion, either in its entirety or in parts. *Metzerott* is a long novel (373 pages), broken into 3 books or volumes. The book can be assigned over 4 class periods, assigning Book 1 (pages 1-145) over two days along with the “Katharine Pearson Woods, *Metzerott, Shoemaker,* and the Women’s Literary Club of Baltimore” Timemapper exhibit on the Katharine Pearson Woods [project page](https://timemapper.okfnlabs.org/anon/dgust7-kpwoods), and a class period each for Books 2 and 3. Alternately, the novel can be assigned to be read outside of class over a period of 10 days to 2 weeks, with one class period reserved to discuss the text.
* Students should be introduced to the annotations provided in the [Digital edition of *Metzerott, Shoemaker*](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/metzerott_formatted), which provide translations of German words and phrases and will help students navigate many of the literary allusions, biblical and historical references.
* Questions for Discussion and Note-taking can be used to guide students’ reading of the novel. Instructors may wish to assign only a selection of the questions, or to assign them in groups across the 3-4 class periods devoted to the novel on the syllabus.

## Questions for Discussion and Note-taking

* Several of the questions point to specific chapters or parts of the novel, while others ask students to consider themes presented across the entire novel. They are organized to correspond roughly with the events as they are narrated.

1. One of the first things that jumps out to modern readers of *Metzerott, Shoemaker* is the use of German language and the inclusion of German-American cultural practices. These aspects of the text mark it as an example of **local color** or **regionalism**, a type of fiction that was extremely popular at the time. Make a list of the German words and terms you encounter as you read, and look them up online. Are you able to find translations or descriptions of what they are (you may not be able to find all of them). You may also wish to consult the sources relating to the German-American community of Wheeling, West Virginia, on which Woods based these characters, on the [Resources](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/woods_resources.html) page of the Katharine Pearson Woods project. What do you learn about Karl Metzerott, his mother, and his neighbors as a result of this research?
2. In chapter 3, we meet a different set of characters, the Randolphs, who live in a different part of Mickleburg. How does the description of the Randolphs’ house and lawn on p. 31 help to differentiate this part of Mickleburg—both architecturally and socially—from the “German quarter” depicted in the first two chapters?
3. How does the character of Dora Weglein help develop the novel’s social and political themes? What does she represent to Frederick Richards? to Karl Metzerott? to Alice Randolph?
4. Different views on religion are represented by a variety of characters in the novel. Frederick Richards and Karl Metzerott are atheists; Ernest Clare is an Episcopal priest; Bryan McClosky is a Catholic priest; and Louis Metzerott becomes a Christ-figure, a *Kinder-Christ*. On p. 172, McClosky asks Clare, “What is a monastery or nunnery but a commune?” After reading the novel, what similarities and key differences do you see between the characters’ religious beliefs? Why does Woods offer all of these different perspectives, and which do you think she intends for us to favor? In what ways do the arguments about belief and faith mirror contemporary debates you have observed in the news, or experienced in your own faith tradition?
5. How does the flood that takes place at the beginning of Book III bring together religious, economic, and social themes in the novel? In what ways does it result in the transformation of the novel’s characters?
6. In what ways do Karl Metzerott and Ernest Clare’s arguments about capitalism and economic inequality resonate with present-day debates about health care, the minimum wage, and workers’ rights?
7. Price’s offers an alternative to the capitalistic factory-based labor represented by the Randolphs’ nail factory. Why is it significant that Price’s was conceived of and led by the Price sisters? What values and perspectives do they represent?
8. Why are Louis and Pinky attracted to one another? Do you find the romantic subplot necessary to the novel? Why/why not?
9. According to Ernest Clare and Bryan McClosky, why is Christianity necessary for socialism to work? Do you agree? Why/why not? In what ways did your views on socialism change as a result of reading this novel?
10. (Spoiler alert) Who do you blame for Louis Metzerott’s death? What lesson are we to learn from his dying?
11. What questions are left unresolved for you at the end of the novel?
12. The “Katharine Pearson Woods, *Metzerott, Shoemaker,* and the Women’s Literary Club of Baltimore” Timemapper exhibit on the Katharine Pearson Woods [project page](https://timemapper.okfnlabs.org/anon/dgust7-kpwoods) and the [Resources](https://wlcb.github.io/archive/woods_resources.html) page for the project link to several reviews of *Metzerott, Shoemaker*. What qualities of the novel do the reviewers praise? What criticisms do they make? What do the reviews show about literary taste of the time? Are their views consistent with your own assessment of the novel, or not? Would you recommend this novel to a friend or a relative to read? If so, why would you recommend it?