

## Further Reading

### **We Were the Mulvaney**

**Joyce Carol Oates (1996)**

**OPRAH OATES**

"Everyone knows the Mulvaney's : Dad the successful businessman, Mike the football star, Marianne the cheerleader, Patrick the brain, Judd the runt, and Mom, dedicated to running the family. But after what sometime narrator Judd calls the events of Valentine's Day, 1976, this ideal family falls apart and is not reunited until 1993."

### **A Widow for One Year**

**John Irving (1998)**

**IRVING**

Chronicles the life of a complex, abrasive woman born in the shadow of her siblings' deaths and her parents' adultery, who only finds love after motherhood and widowhood.

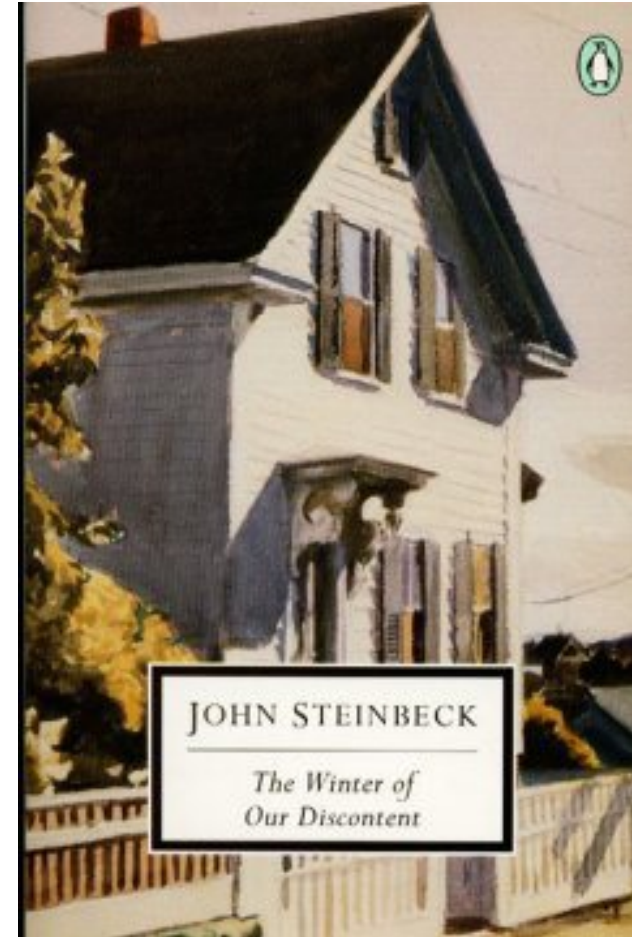
### **The House of the Seven Gables**

**Nathaniel Hawthorne (1851)**

**CLASSIC HAWTHORNE**

The sins of the Pyncheon father are visited upon his children over a period of several generations, until such time as one of his descendants unites with a member of the family he has wronged. Love conquers hate, and new blood washes away the original crime.

## Book Discussion Guide



## About the Book

"A taut, realistic, controversial portrait of Ethan Allen Hawley, scion of an old family, bearing his heritage of high ideals, intrinsic honesty, and fear of insecurity, while confronted with a shattered fortune, the old homestead being the only thing left, and a job as grocery clerk in a store he had once owned."

-Kirkus Reviews

## Discussion Questions

1. *The Winter of Our Discontent* takes place between two holiday weekends—one Easter and the other Independence Day. What is the metaphorical significance of these weekends?
2. Discuss the characters in this book, starting with Ethan Allen Hawley. Much of the book is spent inside his mind. What kind of man is he? What is his moral compass? What pressures do his wife, Mary, and their two children exert on Hawley?
3. Consider the following passage from the book. Do you agree or disagree with the sentiments expressed. Are they cynical or realistic?

*Strength and success—they are above morality, above criticism. It seems, then, that it is not what you do, but how you do it and what you call it. Is there a check in men, deep in them, that stops or punishes? There doesn't seem to be. The only punishment is failure. In effect no crime is committed unless a criminal is caught.*

4. What are the moral issues at the center of this book? Does Hawley "sell his soul" for personal gain? How conflicted is he regarding the dilemmas he faces? Are those dilemmas similar to today's? How?

6. Is this book a tragedy, a comedy? Both? Or something else?

7. Does the book's ambiguous ending satisfy you? What do you think will happen to Hawley?

8. Do you feel that the moral questions in the novel are never fully resolved?

9. What is the significance of the title? The line is uttered by Shakespeare's Richard III—one of Shakespeare's most corrupt characters—who, in the history play of his name, contemplates his frustration during exile from power. Why might Steinbeck have considered "the winter of our discontent" a fitting title for this novel?

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