Welcome to Spoon River! This small midwestern town was home to many interesting characters, most of whom are now "sleeping on the Hill." By way of the poetic epitaphs inscribed on their tombstones, each character narrates one small part in the often dark and mysterious history of this strange place where nothing is as it appears on the surface. But that's the great advantage of having ghosts tell you the story: They have nothing to hide or be ashamed of, and they will usually tell you the whole truth, no matter how sordid, twisted, or ugly it may be. Some of them may even share some life lessons and advice. Others will tell you more than you want to know.

Over the next few days, we will be taking a virtual stroll through the Spoon River Cemetery and hearing the voices of some of the spirits that still haunt that sad place. This experience will take place in the environment of a game of Interactive Fiction called Voices of Spoon River. We will play in the computer lab, but first, let's examine some of the resources that may help you make sense of the epitaphs and solve the mystery at the heart of the game. This list includes all the handouts and references I have used while visiting Spoon River with my classes over the years, so you won't be doing all the assignments, but chances are that a couple of these will end up in your notebook:

- Spoon River Terms & Definitions
- Poetry Terms & Poetry Analysis
  - Jack
  - Epitaphs
- Paired Epitaphs Assignment
- Meet the Purkapiles!
- Spoon River Collections: “The Whole Story”
  - Spoon River Themes & Main Ideas
    - Spoon River Review
  - Interactive Fiction: Try Zork!

Two-fers: Summarize each relationship. Note the poetic elements and ironies in each combination.

- Albert Schirding & Jonas Keene
- Benjamin Pantier & Mrs. Benjamin Pantier
- Roscoe Purkapile & Mrs. Purkapile
- Hamilton Greene & Elsa Wertman

- The following two-fers are instrumental in the VOSR game:
  - Judge Somers & Chase Henry
  - Editor Whedon & Carl Hamblin
  - The Town Marshal & Jack McGuire
  - Ollie McGee & Fletcher McGee
  - Cooney Potter & Fiddler Jones
Read each of these epitaphs carefully: Eugene Carman, Clarence Fawcett, Mrs. George Reece, Jack McGuire, Nicholas Bindle, Henry Phipps, Ralph Rhodes, Thomas Rhodes

Write a brief description of each character. Explain what part the character played in "The Rhodes Affair," and include the character's voice (tone). How does the character feel about his/her life? How do you feel about the character?

Sample: Eugene Carman is bitter and resentful. For 14 years he worked long hours for little pay in a store owned by Thomas Rhodes. Because Rhodes was influential in the church, Carman had to attend services twice a week to keep up appearances. Overcome by rage and resentment for spending so much of his life as "Rhodes' slave," he starts screaming at his reflection, which causes him to have a brain aneurysm and die. I feel sorry for Eugene Carman because he believed he was powerless; he felt that he was controlled by Thomas Rhodes. Maybe he really was.

When you have finished, consider what all the cross-references in these epitaphs tell you about Thomas Rhodes. What kind of a man was he, and what influence did he have on the town of Spoon River?