

***The Return of the Native* by Thomas Hardy: Discussion Questions**

Discussion Guide – Book One

1. In chapter one, Hardy gives life and personality to Egdon Heath. One could almost think of it as one of the main characters. Describe the heath. What is unique about it? Choose some appropriate lines.
2. From chapter 3 find some of the superstitions the heath dwellers believe in: what does it reveal about them and their way of life.
3. Contrast Eustacia and Thomasin.
4. Note Hardy's use of the weather to reinforce the emotional content of a scene, as in the musical wind rising around the figure on the hillside. Any other examples?
5. Diggory Venn is used by Hardy as a connector for the development of the plot. Why is he a "natural" for the part?
6. How has he used coincidence in Chapter 8 to develop the plot and advance it?
7. How are Venn's diligent efforts to help Thomasin ironic?
8. Everything about the novel expresses its theme; how has Hardy suggested that man lives in a universe that is at least indifferent to him? Discuss how contrast of expectation, then defeat, reinforces this theme.
9. List major development in Book I.

Discussion Questions – Book 2

1. What news does Eustacia gain about Clym through the conversation among Captain Vye, Humphrey, and Sam?
2. How old is Eustacia?
3. How do the Yeobrights prepare for Clym's homecoming?
4. Give a brief description of the first meeting of Eustacia and Clym?
5. What is Eustacia's plan to get a closer look at Clym?
6. Describe the party at the Yeobright's home.
7. What part in the play does Eustacia play?
8. Describe Clym.
9. Outline Thomasin's movements through Chapter 6.
10. What point was forgotten?
11. Note ironies attached to the wedding.
12. What does the final scene foreshadow?

Discussion Questions – Book 3

1. What new information do you gain on Clym in Chapters 1 & 2?
2. The haircut scene/tradition casts new light on Clym's plans. How will this complicate Eustacia's plans?
3. Trace the relationship between Eustacia and Clym through chapters 3 & 4.
4. What conflicting thoughts are going through Clym's mind?
5. What breach opens between Clym and his mother in Chapters 5 & 6? Between Wildeve and Thomasin?
6. What is the course of money and its implications in Chapters 7 & 8?

Discussion Questions – Book 4

1. What does Christian suggest to Mrs. Yeobright that Wildeve may do with Clym's share?
2. What is the first question Mrs. Yeobright asks Eustacia when they meet, and how does Eustacia misinterpret the meaning of the question?
3. During the argument about singing while furze-cutting, which of Eustacia's remarks do you think indicates most clearly that the marriage is in trouble?
4. Why is Wildeve in "a delirium of exquisite misery" while dancing?
5. According to Wildeve, what is the great gift the fates have given to Clym?
6. Egdon Heath continues to play a major role in the novel. What two aspects of the heath are instrumental in Mrs. Yeobright's physical collapse?
7. In explaining what he will do with his money, Wildeve mentions two stays in Paris. To what extent do you think he is consciously trying to win Eustacia away from Clym?

Discussion Questions – Book 5

1. Thomasin's "illness" is over at last. What is the result? How does Wildeve feel about this outcome?
2. What startling news does Christian give Clym about Mrs. Yeobright's final day? Who does he say can confirm the news?
3. What is Clym's reason for abandoning the thought of killing Eustacia?
4. What does Thomasin tell Wildeve she has heard about where he used to go evenings and whom he used to be fond of?
5. How are Thomasin's and Eustacia's differing opinions of the heath shown in their reaction to the driving rain?
6. Hardy intends Clym Yeobright to be the hero of the novel as well as its major character. Some readers have questioned whether Clym is either of these. Who do you regard as the hero of the novel? Who seems to be the major character?

Discussion Questions – Book 6

1. Clym thinks Thomasin may be dressing up especially for him at the Maypoling. What do you think?
2. According to the final paragraph of Chapter 2, what seems to be happening during the two months that follow Thomasin and Venn's meeting on the heath?
3. Hardy ends Chapter 3 with a footnote about his original conception of the story, asking the reader to choose between the two endings. Which ending do you prefer, why?
4. Clym still regards his mother as "the sublime saint." In your opinion, how accurate is his recollection of her?
5. To what extent do you think Clym succeeds as an itinerant preacher in Wessex?