

Why you should read Tess of the d'Urbervilles...

1. The character of Tess is complex and interesting and relevant.
2. Hardy's use of imagery is masterful.
3. He is considered one of the best English novelists, yet stopped writing fiction after receiving criticism of Tess and the novel that followed.
4. The moral and ethical questions are still relevant today.

Why you may struggle with Tess of the d'Urbervilles ...

1. A pessimistic mood engulfs much of the novel.
2. His original audience found the subtitle "A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented" outrageous and called the novel "obscene."
3. A pervasive sense of doom and foreboding colors the narrative.
4. The powerlessness of Tess's situation is frustrating at times.

Still interested?

Download novella for free:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/110>

<http://www.pku.edu.cn/study/novel/tess/eindex.htm>

Fast Facts – Tess of the d’Urbervilles

Pages – 414 (Bantam Classic Paperback Edition)

Author – Thomas Hardy

Date Published -- 1891

Setting – Wessex, England

Point of view – Third person omniscient

Genre – Novel

Issues/Conflicts – Social Class / Love / Human Nature / Redemption /

Beyond the Basics...

Check out these sites on the setting:

<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~bp10/wessex/index.shtml>

<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~bp10/wessex/evolution/maps/index.shtml>

Letter about Wessex:

<http://www.yale.edu/hardysoc/images/maps/windle.htm>

Google map of Dorchester:

<http://maps.google.com/maps?q=Dorchester,+United+Kingdom&sa=X&oi=map&ct=title>

Tess of the d'Urbervilles -- Author Information

Thomas Hardy was born on June 2, 1840 in Dorset, England. He was the oldest of four, born to a master mason father who had an ancient lineage similar to the Durbeyfields and who owned a farm similar to Talbothays. Thomas was sickly during his childhood and did not attend school until the age of 8. Although his formal schooling ended at 16, he continued to read and educate himself throughout his life. At the age of 16 he became apprenticed to an architect, a career he followed until the age of 27.

Due to his health, Hardy moved to Dorchester and spent the rest of his life here. In 1874 he married Emma Lavinia Gifford and devoted his life to writing. Poetry was his first passion, but he found fiction to be more profitable. He wrote numerous full-length novels, many short stories and achieved fame by mid-life. His most famous novels are Far From the Madding Crowd (1874), The Return of the Native (1878), The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886), Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891), and Jude the Obscure (1895). After he was criticized for his “vulgar” and “obscene” subject matter in Tess and Jude, he quit writing fiction and spent the remaining 33 years of his life writing poetry. After his wife died in 1912, Hardy married his secretary Florence Emily Drydale in 1914. He died in 1928 and his body is buried in Poet's Corner in Westminster, next to Charles Dickens, and his heart is buried in Dorchester.

More information on Hardy's life and works:

Check out an example of his first love, poetry:

<http://www.cosmoetica.com/TOP6-DES5.htm>

Thomas Hardy society: <http://www.hardysociety.org/>

Thomas Hardy Association:

<http://www.yale.edu/hardysoc/Welcome/welcomet.htm>

Information on his grave site: <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=4112>

Printable Bookmark! Please print and then cut to use as a reference as you read!!
Only basic information has been provided to avoid “spoilers.” The “Intro” column indicates the chapter in which each character is first introduced. Enjoy!

Jack Durbeyfield	Father of Tess	I
Parson Tringham	Travelling parson	I
Tess Durbeyfield	Young, beautiful woman	II
Angel Clare	Youngest Clare	II
Felix Clare	Eldest Clare	II
Cuthbert	Middle Clare	II
Joan Durbeyfield	Married to Jack; mother of Tess	III
Abraham Durbeyfield	Tess's 9 year old brother	III
Eliza-Louisa Durbeyfield	Tess's 12 ½ year old sister	III
Hope and Modesty	Tess's youngest sisters	III
Landlady	Works at Rolliver's Inn	IV
Simon Stoke	Ancient money-lender who usurped d'Urberville name	V
Alecd'Urberville	Son of Simon	V
Mrs. d'Urberville	Mother of Alec; blind	V
Elizabeth	D'Urbervilles' maid	IX
Car Darch	Former conquest of Alec's	X
Nancy Darch	Sister of Car	X
James Clare	Reverend; father of Angel, Felix and Cuthbert	XII
Richard Crick	Master Dairyman	XVII
Jonathan	Works at dairy	XVII
Mrs. Crick	Married to Richard	XVII
Deborah Fyander	Works at dairy	XX
Marian, Retty Priddle, Izz Huett	Young milkmaids who admire Angel	XXI
Jack Dollop	Got maid in trouble	XXI
Beck Knibbs	Helps at dairy	XXII
Mercy Chant	Angel's intended	XXV
Mrs. Clare	Angel's mother	XXV
Sister Clare	In Africa	XXV
AmbySeedling	Izz's suitor	XLV
Farmer Groby	Tess's boss	XLVI
Engine Man	Runs threshing machine	XLVII
Mrs. Brooks	Householder at The Herons	LVI

Menu Ideas – Tess of the d’Urbervilles

Interesting article on the different types of tea and social engagements in England:

<http://www.bartleby.com/95/13.html>

“Eating the English Way” with a recipe for Shepherd’s Pie:

<http://www.cp-pc.ca/english/england/eating.html>

Delicious tea!

<http://www.teaforte.com/>

<http://www.republicoftea.com/>

<http://www.celestiaseasonings.com/index.html>

A plethora of English recipes:

<http://www.allinfoaboutenglishculture.com/menu.html>

Food Network’s Pub Fare:

http://www.foodnetwork.com/food/show_pa/episode/0,1976,FOOD_10234_42895,00.html

Cuisinenet.com --

English Pub Fare: At the heart of pub food is the fare of farmers and laborers: cheese, bread, a bit of sausage or bacon -- often only the fat -- and ale. The ploughman's lunch is cheddar cheese, bread, pickled onions, and ale. From the bar-man one might also order a Cornish pasty (a savory turnover filled with a mix of meat and potatoes) or eggs wrapped in sausage meat -- natural accompaniments for a pint of ale, stout, lager, or hard cider.

Recipes from Cuisinenet.com:

Bangers and Mash:

INGREDIENTS

8-12 large potatoes (peeled and quartered)
1 teaspoon of butter
1/2 cup of milk
1 1/2 lbs beef sausages
1 large onion
Salt and pepper to taste

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS

Preheat the oven, put potatoes in a saucepan with enough water to cover and bring to the boil. Cook until tender, drain and mash with butter and enough milk to reach your desired creaminess. Continue mashing until smooth. Season to taste.

Peel and roughly chop the onion, put it in a small pan (just covering with cold water) and bring to the boil. Then leave it to simmer for 25 minutes.

Put a dash of oil into a frying-pan, prick the sausages with a fork to prevent bursting and cook them over a medium to low heat, turning frequently (they should take about 15 to 20 minutes to cook through).

Drain onion and beat it into the mash, piling the mixture up on a plate, wig-wam style. Fork the sides into a pattern - standing the sausages upright around the potato. Cover with gravy and serve immediately.

Apple Cake

A traditional early autumn recipe from England's West Country

This deliciously moist cake from Somerset ([Dorset](#) lays claim to it, too) can be served cold with cream or eaten as a warm pudding with custard.

Preparation time: approx. 20 minutes

Cooking time: 1 hour

Oven: 375°F / 190°C / gas mark 5

INGREDIENTS

8oz (200g) self-raising flour
Pinch of salt
4oz (100g) butter or margarine
2 large English cooking apples 2 large eggs
Milk
Caster sugar

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS

Sift the flour and salt, then rub in the fat and stir in the sugar. Peel, core and grate (or chop) the apples and weigh out 8oz (200g) of apple to add to the dry ingredients. Make a well in the centre, beat the eggs and add to the bowl with sufficient milk to make a soft but not too wet mixture. Put into a greased and floured 7-inch round cake tin and sprinkle the top with caster sugar. Bake for about 1 hour or until golden brown.

Cheddar Cheese & Apple Salad

A light English salad for those warm summer days

Preparation time: 25 minutes

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

1/2 round lettuce
5 fl oz (150ml) fresh soured cream
3 tablespoons of fresh milk
1 teaspoon of lemon juice
Salt and freshly ground pepper
2 medium sized English eating apples (cored & diced)
8oz (225g) English Cheddar Cheese (diced)
4 canned pears, drained and chopped
Parsley to decorate

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS

Wash and dry lettuce, then tear into smallish pieces and use to cover the base of your serving dish. Combine the soured cream, milk, lemon juice and seasoning before adding the apples, cheese and pears and mixing together. Pile on the lettuce and garnish with parsley.

Summer Pudding

Traditional English Country Fare

This sweet is a popular English farmhouse recipe, ideal for using up those delicious summer fruits.

Preparation time: 25 minutes plus overnight chilling

Cooking time: 10 minutes

Serves 4-6 people

INGREDIENTS

6 large slices of bread (crustless)
4oz (100g) sugar (or to taste)
5tbsp (75ml) water
1½lb (700g) soft summer fruits (raspberries, strawberries, blackberries, blackcurrants)
5floz (150ml) double cream (fresh)
1tbsp (15ml) milk (fresh)
Sprig of mint to decorate

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS

Slice the bread into fingers, put the sugar and water into a saucepan and, stirring, heat until the sugar melts. Add the fruit and simmer gently for between 7-10 minutes (until almost soft) - keeping back a few spoonfuls of the juice. Line a 2 pint (1.1 litre) pudding basin or soufflé dish with the bread fingers. Add about half the hot fruit mixture and cover with more bread fingers. Cover the basin with a plate or saucer and weigh it down with something heavy. Leave it in the refrigerator overnight, then turn it out on to a plate just before serving. Cover any white patches with reserved juice and decorate with fruit and mint.

Serve with cream, whipped with milk until lightly stiff.

Tess of the d'Urbervilles – Creating the Mood!!

Here are some ideas to set the mood and get the conversation started to help you appreciate Conrad's classic. Enjoy!

Introductory Game Ideas:

- Consider discussing why this novel was met with such moral repugnance when first published – especially regarding the original subtitle: “A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented.” Why is there a double-standard concerning the virtue of men and women? Is it still present today?
- The 1979 film version of the novel was nominated for Best Picture and would be a good companion piece to the novel.

Link to film: <http://imdb.com/title/tt0080009/trivia>

- Or, see if your local library has a video biography of Hardy – his life was fascinating!

Literary Terms – Tess of the d’Urbervilles

Exposition – the introduction of the setting, characters, conflict(s) at the beginning of a novel. Our first impressions are so influential to our enjoyment and impressions of the novel, so after finishing, skim the first chapter again to see how the author shaped and influenced your first impressions. Consider why Hardy begins the novel with the passing comments of an unnamed parson.

Diction – word choice. Notice Hardy’s word choice and how that influences your reading speed as well as enjoyment level. Notice how the diction matches the social class of the speaker, with the exception of Tess, “who had passed the Sixth Standard in the National School under a London-trained mistress, [and therefore] spoke two languages; the dialect at home, more or less; ordinary English abroad and to persons of quality” (ch. III).

Syntax – the style of sentence structure. Notice how the author’s crafting of syntax affects your engagement as a reader. Complexity of syntax does not determine literary merit; the pairing of syntax to meaning does.

Tone – the author’s attitude toward subject. Think “tone of voice.” Tone is created through diction and can be very subtle, but is extremely important. If you misinterpret the tone, you most likely misinterpret the meaning or theme of the narrative.

Mood – the emotional atmosphere of novel. Mood is considered an aspect of the setting (time, place, *atmosphere*). When we read a novel, we “read ourselves,” so think about what type of mood your favorite novels tend to have and how different moods may influence your enjoyment level. Notice how Hardy’s use of “Phases” and subtitles to divide the narrative affect the mood.

Theme – the main idea that runs throughout and unifies novel. Theme should be stated as a complete thought and not one word, which would instead be a topic of the novel: instead of “lineage” or “love,” consider what the author is saying about the importance of lineage or the nature of love in the novel. In classics, themes are frequently not “morals;” they may or may not represent the ideal.

Irony – the opposite of what it expected. ***Dramatic irony*** is when the reader has more information than the character does, providing the reader with an all-knowing perspective. ***Situational irony*** is when a situation turns out differently than expected. ***Verbal irony*** is when the speaker means the opposite of what is said, so correctly interpreting tone becomes crucial to the reader's understanding of the events and particularly of the themes. Irony is pervasive throughout this novel, from Alec's false appropriation of Tess's true name to Angel's reaction to Tess's confession of a failing identical to his own, to his rejection of conventional religion but adherence to conventional morality.

Imagery – the use of words that engage the senses. Notice how Conrad's powerful use of imagery right from the beginning:

She was a fine and handsome girl – not handsomer than some others, possibly – but her mobile peony mouth and large innocent eyes added eloquence to colour and shape. She wore a red ribbon in her hair, and was the only one of the white company who could boast of such a pronounced adornment.

He had an almost swarthy complexion, with full lips, badly moulded, though red and smooth, above which was a well-groomed black moustache with curled points...Despite the touches of barbarism in his contours, there was a singular force in the gentleman's face, and in his bold rolling eye.

Symbolism – when an element of the story (object, character, color, etc.) is both literally present in the novel *and* has significance or represents something beyond itself. Consider what symbolic significance the d'Urberville's family vault have to the meaning of the story.

Foil – when two characters contrast each other. The characters do not need to be enemies – or even be aware of one another. Alec and Angel are foils in temperament, nature and significance to Tess.

Foreshadowing – when the author provides hints to future events. Notice how Hardy's use of section titles foreshadows the events to come.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles Discussion Questions

The following questions approach the novel from a number of different angles, i.e., how the novel functions as a work of art, how it reflects the time period, how it addresses fundamental questions of humanity, and how it engages the reader. A good discussion tends to start with our “heads” and end with our “hearts.” So, you may want to save subjective opinions of taste until after you have discussed the more objective elements of why this work is considered a classic. It is tempting to begin with, “What did everyone think?” But if a number of people really didn’t like the novel, their opinions may derail a discussion of the novel’s merits. On the other hand, I recommend starting with a few accessible questions and asking every member to respond to ensure that all voices are present and heard from the beginning. Just a few suggestions! Enjoy...

Warm up questions:

- Which character did you empathize with the most? Which characters did you dislike the most and why?
- Which sections read the fastest? Which dragged?

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1. How did the titles of the Phases affect your enjoyment? Did you appreciate getting a “sneak preview” of each section (“The Maiden” “Maiden No More” “Fulfilment”)?
 2. At the May Day dance, what first attracts Angel to Tess?

3. Here is Hardy's reaction to Tess soon after her virtue is vanquished:

But this encompassment of her own characterization, based on shreds of convention, peopled by phantoms and voices antipathetic to her, was a sorry and mistaken creation of Tess's fancy—a cloud of moral hobgoblins by which she was terrified without reason. It was they that were out of harmony with the actual world, not she. Walking among the sleeping birds in the hedges, watching the skipping rabbits on a moonlit warren, or standing under a pheasant-laden bough, she looked upon herself as a figure of Guilt intruding into the haunts of Innocence. But all the while she was making a distinction where there was no difference. Feeling herself in antagonism she was quite in accord. She had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly.

How does Hardy want us to view Tess at this point in the story?

4. At what point should Tess have told Angel about her past? Or do you agree with her mother's advice to keep it a secret? In chapter XL, Angel declares that he would have forgiven her if he had known before their marriage – do you agree?
5. Why does Angel believe Tess's confession is worse than his own?
6. How did you react to Tess's desire for death – whether she wished she had never been born or her contemplation of suicide?
7. Is it believable that Tess would murder Alec? Why/not?
8. Why is it appropriate that the novel end at Stonehenge?
9. Should Hardy have developed Liza Lu more since she was to become so significant to Angel's future?
10. Irony pervades this novel – from Alec's false claim to his name to Angel's reaction to Tess's past to the irony of titling the novel Tess of the d'Urbervilles, rather than *Durbeyfields*?

11. Lineage and social class are important elements in this novel, and in various societies throughout the ages. Why does human nature care about the status of relatives long gone, even when there is no money to be gained? Where do we see this in society today? Rather than basing status on land-holdings, how do we determine merit today? Since Tess's difficulties are caused in part by the revelation of her ancestors, what does Hardy seem to be saying about lineage?
12. How responsible should we hold Tess for her life? Notice that Tess stays with Alec for at least a month after their moment in the woods and even says, in chapter 12, **"My eyes were dazed by you for a little... temporarily blinded by [your] ardent manner... stirred to confused surrender awhile...if I had ever sincerely loved you."** Hardy declares hers were "not sins of intention, but of inadvertence" in ch. 51. Do you agree?
13. Many of the events that lead to Tess meeting Alec seem accidental or circumstantial – the passing comment to John about his lineage, her parents drunkenness compelling her to take the beehives w/ her brother, the death of Prince, Tess's beauty, her parents' insistence that she meet the "true" D'Urbervilles. What does Hardy seem to imply about chance, fate, and human action?
14. In chapter XV, Hardy includes a quote by Saint Augustine: **"Thou hast counseled a better course than Thou hast permitted."** Does this quote succinctly describe Tess's situation?
15. Which stroke of fate or luck or coincidence seems most responsible for the ultimate tragedy of Tess's life?

16. In his introduction, Robert B. Heilman characterizes Hardy's style of characterization:
They are pervaded by the conflict between aspirations and actuality, and particularly by the circumstances—in one's own nature, in social processes and attitudes, in the way things happen in the world (accident, coincidence, the unforeseen, bad weather), even in the cosmos—that disappoint, injure, or destroy man.

Do you agree?

17. When first published, the public was shocked and dismayed by what they considered to be a vulgar and obscene story and, according to Heilman, Hardy's view that **“the firmer an individual's adherence to principle, the greater his liabilities in the world.”** Where do we see this most vividly?

18. Heilman also proposes that:
On the one hand both Alec and Angel injure Tess because they misunderstand her: Alec thinks she is... to be had for the coaxing and the price; Angel thinks she is not worth the price he has paid. Both revalue her: Alec wants to make her his wife... after she is married to Angel; Angel accepts her as his wife after Alec has, for the second time, come between them.

Do you agree?

19. Are the coincidences in the story distracting?

Wrap up Questions!

1. Which character did you relate to the most?
2. Would you recommend the book to others?
3. If you could change anything, what would it be?
4. Do you believe this should be considered a classic?
5. Do you believe this novel should be taught in high schools?

Tess of the d'Urbervilles – the film

A number of film versions have been made of Tess, including a 1998 made-for-television version, a 1979 award-winning television version starring Nastassja Kinski, directed by Roman Polanski. Your group could watch a version of the movie together and discuss your impressions, or group members could watch a version before the meeting and then discuss impressions as a group. Time permitting, multiple versions could be viewed and then compared. Here are a few possible movie questions:

- While viewing the movie, which characters were most unlike how you pictured them while reading the novel?
- Which characters seemed “right on” in their portrayal?
- What plot elements were left out or changed in the movie?
- How was your enjoyment affected by what was left out/changed?
- If this movie were remade today, who would you cast as Tess, Angel, and Alec?
- The 1979 version won Oscars for Best Art Direction-Set Decoration, Best Cinematography, and Best Costume Design, and was nominated for Best Director, Best Music and Best Picture. Which of these awards or nominations seem most merited?

More information on the film(s):

<http://imdb.com/title/tt0126100/>

<http://imdb.com/title/tt0080009/trivia>