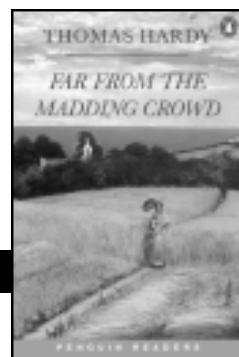


Teacher's notes

Far from the Madding Crowd

by Thomas Hardy

**SUMMARY**

The great English novelist – Thomas Hardy – wrote *Far from the Madding Crowd* in 1874.

When Bathsheba Everdene, a beautiful, lively young woman, arrives in a remote country district, she creates chaos in the hearts of the local men. Gabriel Oak, a local farmer, soon proposes marriage to her but Bathsheba refuses him. Bathsheba mischievously sends a Valentine card to a wealthy local farmer called Boldwood, who falls deeply in love with her and also proposes marriage. But a handsome and charming soldier, Sergeant Troy, appears and Bathsheba falls madly in love with him and secretly marries him.

Too late, Bathsheba discovers that Troy is an unfaithful person. When a young woman who loved Troy is discovered dead, with Troy's dead child beside her, Troy becomes violently remorseful and leaves Bathsheba. Believing that Troy is dead, a year later Bathsheba is about to consent to marry Boldwood when Troy reappears. In a fit of passion, Boldwood kills Troy and is sent to prison for life.

The story ends with a sadder and wiser Bathsheba marrying the faithful Gabriel Oak, who has loved her all along.

ABOUT THOMAS HARDY

Thomas Hardy was born in 1840 in a village in Dorset, in England. His father was a stonemason, and the family was not well-off, but his mother encouraged his interest in books from an early age. It was in his childhood that Hardy acquired his deep love of the countryside and village life. As a young man, Hardy trained as an architect and went to work in London. His first novel, *Desperate Remedies*, was published in 1867. *Under the Greenwood Tree*, his second novel, was published in 1872, bringing him success and interest from the literary world. Hardy's fourth novel, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), was so successful that Hardy was able to give up architecture for writing. He married the woman he loved, Emma Gifford, but it was not a happy marriage.

Hardy's greatest novels are agreed to be: *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Return of the Native* (1878), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1896). His home was in Dorset, but he spent part of the year in London where he mixed in literary society and was much admired, although critics complained about the immorality and pessimism of his later books. The author never felt entirely comfortable in London society, however, and could not forget his country roots.

Hardy had always written poetry and his output increased in the last thirty years of his life. After Emma's death, Hardy married his secretary, Emily Dugdale. Today he is considered to be a great poet as well as a great novelist. He died in 1928.

BACKGROUND AND THEMES

Far from the Madding Crowd was Hardy's first really successful novel. As the title suggests, the story takes place deep in the countryside, in a county called Wessex. This was Hardy's fictional name for Dorset, the county in the west of England where the author was brought up and where he spent much of his life as an adult. Almost all Hardy's novels are set against this background. Hardy had a profound love of country life, which shows in his magnificent descriptions of nature and in his convincing descriptions of country people.

During the author's lifetime, England was transformed from an agricultural society into an industrial one. Many of Hardy's novels are concerned with describing a way of life in the countryside that was fast vanishing. By writing about it, Hardy both expressed his love of it and preserved it for his readers and for future generations.

Hardy's novels are often about men and women, their relationships and the barriers that come between them. In a number of Hardy's novels, these barriers are concerned with class and money. In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, its heroine, Bathsheba, is quite rich and is uninterested in Gabriel Oaks, who is a mere shepherd. Gabriel wins Bathsheba in the end, however, because he shows the solid worth of his character. But he has also risen in status to become a farm manager.

Hardy's main characters are always psychologically convincing. Certain character types recur in his novels. One of these is the 'capricious' woman, like Bathsheba. Bathsheba is beautiful and at the start of the story, rather superficial. A little upset by Farmer Boldwood's lack of interest in her, she sends him a teasing Valentine card. This flirtatious act eventually brings about terrible tragedy and Boldwood's imprisonment for life. Bathsheba suffers in other ways, falling passionately in love with the handsome, dashing soldier, Sergeant Troy, a man who is far more irresponsible than she herself is. By the end of the story, poor Bathsheba has learnt that passionate romantic love can blind a person to defects of character, and that what really counts is steadiness and integrity.

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Hardy has been accused by critics of being a woman-hater, but it is truer to say that Hardy is interested in exploring both a woman's character defects and her strengths. Certainly this is true in Bathsheba's case. Superficiality is only one aspect of Bathsheba's character. She is also portrayed as a strong, independent woman, capable of running a farm and dealing with neighbouring farmers (all men) on an equal basis.

It is generally agreed that Hardy's view of life is pessimistic. There are suicides and tragic deaths in a number of his novels. *Far from the Madding Crowd* is no exception. Obsessed by Bathsheba and desperately frustrated in his desire for her, Boldwood ends by killing Sergeant Troy. Over and over again in his novels, Hardy seems to be telling us that romantic passion is a dangerous, heartbreaking illusion. But unlike some of his later novels, *Far from the Madding Crowd* ends happily. The reader is left with the feeling that Bathsheba's marriage to Gabriel Oak will be a happy one, with the couple having achieved a relationship based on equality and mutual respect.

Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the reader, and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book, see the photocopyable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of discussion and pair/groupwork questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

Make photocopies of the picture on page vi, hiding the caption. In pairs, students look at the photocopy and answer these questions.

- What is the woman doing? What do you think she is thinking?
- What is the man doing? What do you think he is thinking?
- What do you think the man's job is? Why?
- What can you guess about the woman from the picture?
- Do you think they know each other? Why/why not?
- Write a caption for the picture.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Chapters 1–3

- Put students into pairs to do the following:
 - Describe Bathsheba from the point of view of (i) Gabriel Oak, (ii) Farmer Boldwood.
 - Describe Sergeant Troy from (i) the point of view of Fanny Robin, (ii) your point of view.
- Put students into pairs to discuss:
What is a Valentine card? Do you have them in your country? Do you think they are a good idea? Why/why not?

Chapters 4–5

Put students into pairs to answer the following question:



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What kind of person do you think these people should marry? Write a description.

Bathsheba, Gabriel, Mr Boldwood

Chapters 6–8

Put students into pairs. They say how the relationship between Gabriel and Bathsheba changes during these chapters. Also ask them this question:

In what ways does Gabriel show that he is a real friend to Bathsheba?

Chapters 9–10

Put students into pairs to answer the following question.

- What are the feelings of Bathsheba, Boldwood and Gabriel in these chapters? Explain the reasons for their feelings.
- If you had to be one of these people, which person would you choose to be? Explain your reasons.

Chapters 11–12

Put students into groups. Ask them to imagine that they are villagers in Weatherbury. Gabriel and Bathsheba have just got married. The villagers are in the village pub. They discuss the marriage and the things that have happened over the past years.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

Put students into groups of four, then divide each group into pairs. One pair must argue that country people in the period that this story was written (1870s) were happier than people are now. The other pair must argue the opposite – country people are happier today. Give students 5–10 minutes to prepare their arguments, then have a whole class discussion on the subject.

GLOSSARY

It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the 'Before You Read' sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

Chapters 1–3

- corn** (n) the plants and seeds from which bread is made
farmyard (n) the area next to or around farm buildings
lamb (n) a young sheep
shepherd (n) someone whose job is to look after sheep
straw (n) dried plants used to make beds for animals and to make baskets
St Valentine's Day (n) a day (February 14th) when people give cards and presents to a girl or boy they love
wagon (n) a strong vehicle with four wheels, pulled by a horse

Chapters 4–5

- shear** (v) to cut the wool off a sheep

Chapters 6–8

- harvest** (v) to cut the corn in the fields
hay-make (v) to cut long grass and leave it to dry
sergeant (n) an officer of fairly low level in the army
sword (n) a very long knife which is used for fighting

Chapters 9–10

- bury** (v) to put a dead body into the ground
coffin (n) the box in which a dead body is put
misery (n) when someone is very unhappy
passion (n) a very strong feeling of love
workhouse (n) a place where very poor people lived and worked in past times

Chapters 11–12

- faithful** (adj) staying loyal to someone

Student's activities

Far from the Madding Crowd



Photocopiable

These activities can be done alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.

Activities before reading the book

Read the Introduction in the book. Then close the book and answer these questions.

Who ...

- (a) married Thomas Hardy?
- (b) is handsome but selfish?
- (c) was born in the south-west of England?
- (d) is beautiful and independent?
- (e) wrote most of his poems after the age of 70?
- (f) loses his farm?
- (g) died at the age of 88?

Activities while reading the book

CHAPTERS 1–3

Chapter 1

- 1 Put these sentences in the order of the story.
 - (a) Bathsheba goes to live at Weatherbury.
 - (b) Gabriel asks Bathsheba to marry him.
 - (c) Bathsheba lives with her aunt in the village.
 - (d) Bathsheba looks at herself in the mirror.
 - (e) Gabriel starts to fall in love with Bathsheba.
 - (f) Gabriel sees a wagon full of furniture.
- 2 Work in pairs. Discuss these questions.
 - (a) If you were Bathsheba, would you marry Gabriel Oak? Say why/why not.
 - (b) What advice would you give Gabriel?
 - (c) Bathsheba says she is independent. From her conversation with Gabriel, do you agree with her? Say why/why not.

Chapter 2

- 1 Close your book. Complete these sentences.
 - (a) Gabriel loses his and becomes a again.
 - (b) Gabriel helps to put the
 - (c) now owns a large
 - (d) starts working for
 - (e) Bathsheba decides to her farm
 - (f) Fanny Robins runs with a
- 2 Talk to another student.
Has your opinion about Gabriel changed? If so, say why. Do you think Bathsheba should marry him? Say why/why not.

Chapter 3

- 1 Answer these questions.

- (a) Why does Fanny Robins wait in a church?
- (b) Why doesn't Sergeant Troy come, do you think?
- (c) Why do the men farmers admire Bathsheba?
- (d) What kind of man is Boldwood?

- 2 Hardy writes: 'What small things change people's lives!' Where in these chapters does he say this? What is he talking about here, do you think? What do you think could happen in the next chapters?

CHAPTERS 4–5

Chapter 4

- 1 Match the two parts of the sentences.

- (a) Boldwood asks Gabriel
- (b) Bathsheba realizes that
- (c) Boldwood asks Bathsheba
- (d) Gabriel tells Bathsheba that
- (e) Bathsheba tells Gabriel
- (i) to marry him.
- (ii) she was not kind to Boldwood.
- (iii) to leave her farm.
- (iv) if he recognizes the writing on the envelope.
- (v) Boldwood knows she sent the Valentine card.

- 2 Work in pairs. You are Bathsheba and Gabriel. Have their conversation on page 16.

Chapter 5

- 1 Answer these questions. Then compare your answers with those of another student.
 - (a) How is the soldier different from Boldwood and Gabriel?
 - (b) 'It was a great mistake of Boldwood's that he had never once told her that she was beautiful.' What does Hardy mean by these words, do you think?
 - (c) Do you think Bathsheba will marry Boldwood? Say why/why not.
- 2 Write the story of this chapter. Then exchange papers with another student and correct their work.

CHAPTERS 6–8

Chapter 6

Discuss these questions with another student.

- (a) Which of these words describe Sergeant Troy and which describe Gabriel? Explain why these words describe them. Look up charming in your dictionary.
charming, loving, honest, dishonest

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Student's activities

- (b) Do you feel worried about Bathsheba? Say why/why not.

Chapter 7

- Correct the mistakes in these sentences.
 - Boldwood feels very jealous of Gabriel.
 - Bathsheba leaves Weatherbury and is away for four days.
 - Troy and Gabriel meet one morning.
 - Boldwood offers Troy fifty pounds to marry Bathsheba.
 - Troy tells Boldwood that he has married Fanny.
- Work in pairs. Continue the chapter. Write another two or three paragraphs.

Chapter 8

- Answer these questions.
 - Why does Gabriel, rather than Troy, cover the corn?
 - Why did Bathsheba marry Troy?
 - What is happening to Boldwood and his life?
- Work in pairs. Imagine that Bathsheba has a conversation with her aunt. Bathsheba explains why she married Troy. She also tells her aunt how she feels about Troy now. Have their conversation.

CHAPTERS 9-10

Chapter 9

- Read these questions. Who asks them? What happens next, or what is the answer to these questions. Also, briefly explain the situation.
 - 'But you do still love me, don't you, Frank?'
 - 'Why will nobody talk to me, or look at me?'
 - 'What's the matter, in God's name? Who's dead?'
 - 'If she's .. , that, ... what ... am I?'
- Work with another student.
Write a letter from Troy to Bathsheba telling her why he has left her.
- What is your opinion of Troy? Has it changed in this chapter? Say why/why not.

Chapter 10

- Are these sentences true, false, or don't you know? Write, T, F or Don't know.
 - Troy goes out swimming and dies.
 - Bathsheba believes that Troy is still alive.
 - Boldwood's farm is doing well.
 - Gabriel Oak becomes farm manager for Bathsheba and Boldwood.
 - Boldwood asks Bathsheba to marry him at Christmas.
 - Bathsheba asks Gabriel for his advice at Christmas.
 - Gabriel tells Bathsheba to marry Boldwood.

- 2 Work in pairs. Discuss these questions.

- Do you agree with Gabriel's advice to Bathsheba? Say why/why not.
- What advice would you give Bathsheba?

- 3 Work in pairs. What do you think will happen in the last two chapters? Write down your guesses.

CHAPTERS 11-12

Chapter 11

- Complete the questions using these words: Why, Who. Then answer the questions.
 - didn't Troy die at sea?
 - does Troy decide to return to Bathsheba?
 - does Bathsheba agree to marry Boldwood in six years' time?
 - shoots and kills Troy?
 - does Troy get shot?
 - doesn't Boldwood shoot himself?
- Work with another student. Discuss these questions.
 - How do you think Bathsheba feels at the death of Troy?
 - Where do you think Boldwood goes when he leaves the house?
 - What do you think will happen in the last chapter?

Chapter 12

- Look at the words in *italics* in these sentences. Who are these people? Explain the situation.
 - 'He's not going to die.'
 - For months *she* had stayed in the house ...
 - I'm* thinking of leaving England ...
 - She* knocked quietly.'
 - 'Things have been said about *us*, you see.'
 - 'But *you* will never know,'
 - 'I've danced at your feet for many a long mile ...'
- Talk to another student.
Do you think Gabriel and Bathsheba will be happy together? Give reasons for your opinion.

Activities after reading the book

Talk to two other students.

- At the end of the story, Gabriel and Bathsheba marry. Do you think Gabriel deserves to marry Bathsheba? Does Bathsheba deserve to marry Gabriel? Are you happy to see them marry? Give reasons for your opinion.
- What do you think Thomas Hardy wants to tell the reader in this book? Give reasons for your opinion.



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