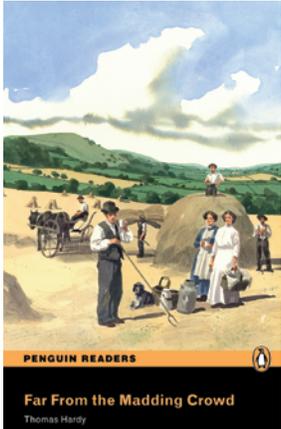




Far from the Madding Crowd

Thomas Hardy



About the author

Thomas Hardy was born in 1840 in a quiet village in Dorset, England. His father was a stonemason, and therefore the family wasn't well-off, but this didn't prevent his mother from encouraging him to take an interest in books from an early age. It was during his childhood in Dorset that Hardy acquired his deep love of the countryside and the simple existence of 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 1871, and his second novel, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, was published one year later, bringing him much success and popularity in the literary world. His fourth novel, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, which was published in 1874, was so successful that he was able to give up his job as an architect in order to focus exclusively on writing.

Most critics agree that Hardy's greatest novels are *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Return of the Native* (1878), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1896). Hardy had always enjoyed – and excelled at – writing poetry as well as fiction, and the output of his poems increased in the last thirty years of his life. Nowadays, he is considered not only a masterful novelist, but also an accomplished poet.

Hardy's home was in Dorset, but he spent part of the year in London, where he mixed in with other leading members of the nation's literary society. He was admired by readers and critics alike, although some complained about the immorality and pessimism that appeared in his later books. However, Hardy never felt entirely comfortable in London society, and couldn't forget his country roots. He married the woman he loved, Emma

Gifford, but sadly their marriage wasn't a happy one. After Emma's death, Hardy remarried – this time to his secretary, Emily Dugdale. He died in 1928.

Summary

Chapters 1–7: When Bathsheba Everdene, a beautiful and 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 named Boldwood, who falls deeply in love with her and also proposes marriage. However, a handsome and charming young soldier, Sergeant Troy, appears, and Bathsheba falls madly in love with him – and secretly marries him.

Chapters 8–12: Bathsheba eventually discovers that Sergeant Troy is an unfaithful person. When a young woman who once loved Sergeant Troy is discovered dead, with his dead child lying beside her, Sergeant Troy becomes violently remorseful and leaves Bathsheba. Believing that Sergeant Troy is dead, Bathsheba is about to consent to marry Boldwood a year later when Sergeant Troy suddenly reappears. In a fit of passion, Boldwood kills Sergeant Troy and goes to prison for life. The story ends with a sadder and wiser Bathsheba marrying the faithful Gabriel Oak, who has loved her all along.

Background and themes

Country life: As the title suggests, *Far from the Madding Crowd* ('Madding' means 'acting madly' *Chamber's Dictionary*) is set in the countryside in a county called Wessex, which was Hardy's fictional name for Dorset, the county in which he had been born and raised. Nearly all of his novels are set against a rural background, as he had a profound love of country life, which is demonstrated in his magnificent descriptions of nature and his convincing descriptions of country people.

Resisting industrialism: 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 quickly vanishing. By writing about the country life, he was able to express the love he felt towards it, while preserving it for future generations.

Men and women: Hardy's novels often deal with men and women – their relationships and the barriers that come between them. In a number of his novels, these barriers



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are a result of class and money. For example, in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Bathsheba is rather rich and therefore uninterested in Gabriel Oak, who is a mere shepherd. However, Gabriel wins Bathsheba's affections in the end because he manages to demonstrate the solid worth of his character. It is interesting to note that he has also risen in status to become a farm manager.

Realistic characters: Hardy's characters are psychologically convincing. Basic character types recur in his novels, such as the capricious woman, represented by Bathsheba in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Bathsheba is beautiful and rather superficial. Becoming slightly upset by Farmer Boldwood's lack of interest in her, she sends him a teasing valentine card, and this flirtatious act eventually results in tragedy. Bathsheba then falls in love with the handsome and dashing Sergeant Troy, who is far more irresponsible than even she is. By the end of the story, Bathsheba has learnt that love can blind a person to defects of character, and that what really counts is honesty, steadiness and integrity.

Exploring women's defects and strengths: Hardy was accused of being a woman-hater because he often showed his female characters in a negative light, but the fact of the matter is that he was simply interested in exploring the defects and strengths of a woman's character. This is true in the case of Bathsheba, who is portrayed negatively as arrogant and superficial, and positively as strong-willed and independent.

Pessimism: Hardy's novels, which are filled with suicides and other tragic deaths, are generally regarded as pessimistic. *Far from the Madding Crowd* is no exception. Obsessed by Bathsheba, Boldwood ends up killing Sergeant Troy. Hardy seems to be telling the reader that romantic passion is a dangerous, heartbreaking illusion. However, unlike some of his later novels, *Far from the Madding Crowd* ends happily. The reader is left with the feeling that Bathsheba and Gabriel Oak have achieved a relationship based on equality and mutual respect.

Discussion activities

Chapters 1–3

Before reading

- Discuss:** Ask students to look at the picture on the cover of the book. *Do you think that this is a good cover for the book? Why or why not? What do you like about the cover? Why do you like it? What don't you like about the cover? Why don't you like it?*

- Pair work:** Put students into pairs and ask them to look at the cover of *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Get them to write down the people, animals and things that they can see on the cover of the book. When they have finished, some of the pairs should read out their list to the rest of the class. Then write the following combinations of letters on the board – they are anagrams of the people, animals and things that can be seen on the cover of the book. Finally, ask students to spell the words correctly.

- nam
- brose
- dgo
- tah
- nwmoa

- Discuss:** Ask students to think about why Chapter 1 is called *An Offer of Marriage*. *What is marriage? Who usually offers marriage – a man or a woman? How is marriage usually offered? Has marriage changed since 1874, when Far from the Madding Crowd was first published? If so, how has it changed? What is the same about marriage in those days and marriage nowadays?*

After reading

- Pair work:** Put students into pairs and get them to take turns describing Bathsheba from the point of view of **a)** Gabriel Oak and **b)** Farmer Boldwood. Then get them to take turns describing Sergeant Troy from **a)** the point of view of Fanny Robin and **b)** their own point of view.
- Discuss:** Put students into small groups and get them to discuss the following questions:
Have you ever received a valentine card? If so, who gave it to you? How did you feel when you received it? Have you ever given a valentine card to someone? If so, who did you give it to? How did you feel when you gave it to the person? Do you think valentine cards are a good idea? Why or why not?

Chapters 4–6

Before reading

- Discuss:** Ask students to think about why Chapter 4 is called *I Want You as My Wife*. *Who do you think makes this statement? Why do you think this? Who do you think the person is talking to? Why do you think this?*

After reading

- Artwork:** Put students into pairs and get them to draw a picture to describe Chapter 4, 5 or 6. When they have finished, the pairs should stand at the front of the classroom and describe their picture to the rest of the class, and the class should guess which chapter the picture illustrates.



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- 8 Role play:** Put students into pairs. Student A is Bathsheba and Student B is Farmer Boldwood. Farmer Boldwood should tell Bathsheba that he wants to marry her and explain why he feels this way. Bathsheba should listen to his statement and then respond to his reasons as completely as possible. When they have finished, some of the pairs should role play their conversations in front of the class.

Chapters 7–9

Before reading

- 9 Guess:** Ask students to predict what will happen to Bathsheba and the other characters in Chapters 7–9.
- 10 Research:** Put students into pairs and get them to look up the word *jealous* in a dictionary. Make the exercise into a competition – the first pair of students to find the definition wins. They should stand up and read the definition out loud to the rest of the class.

After reading

- 11 Check:** Review students' predictions about what would happen to Bathsheba and the other characters in Chapters 7–9. Check if their predictions were right or wrong.
- 12 Read carefully:** Put students into groups of three and get them to read the three captions in Chapters 7–9 out loud. The first student should stand up and carefully read the first caption (page 29) out loud, the second student should stand up and read the second caption (page 32) out loud, and the third student should stand up and read the third caption (page 37) out loud.
- 13 Artwork:** Get students to draw a picture of one of the characters in Chapters 7–9. When they have finished, they should stand at the front of the classroom and describe their picture to the rest of the class, and the class should guess which character the picture illustrates.

Chapters 10–12

Before reading

- 14 Pair work:** Write the word *hope* on the board and teach students what it means. Then put students into pairs and ask them to think about why Chapter 10 is called *Boldwood Still Has Hope*. *What do you think Boldwood hopes for in Chapter 10? Why do you think this? Do you think he will get what he hopes for? Why or why not? What do you think will happen to Boldwood in Chapter 10? Why do you think this?*

After reading

- 15 Write:** Put students into small groups and get them to write a sentence to describe what happens in Chapter 10, a sentence to describe what happens in Chapter 11 and a sentence to describe what happens in Chapter 12. When they have finished, some of the groups should read their sentences to the rest of the class. Finally, take a vote to find out which group wrote the best sentences.
- 16 Role play:** Put students into groups of three and get them to imagine that they are villagers in Weatherbury. They are in the village pub, and Gabriel and Bathsheba have just got married. They should discuss the marriage and the things that have happened in the village in the past.
- 17 Debate:** Divide the class into two groups and write the following statement on the board: 'Living in the country is better than living in the city.' Get one group to argue for the statement and the other group to argue against it. Give them time to prepare their arguments – help them to come up with ideas if necessary. Then get one student from each group to present one aspect of the group's argument. When both groups have finished presenting their arguments, choose the group that made the best argument as the winner of the debate.

Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.