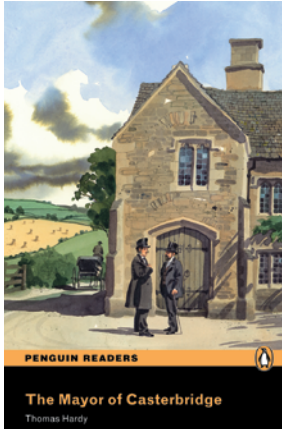




The Mayor of Casterbridge

Thomas Hardy



About the author

Thomas Hardy was born in 1840 in Dorset, a rural county in the south-west of England. His father was a stonemason and the family were not well off. Hardy showed an early interest in books, however, and when he was sixteen, he began training as an architect in Dorchester. In 1862, he went to work in London, where he was able to compare city life with the customs and timeless ways of the country village where he grew up. He began writing in his spare time. In 1870, he met and fell in love with Emma Gifford, but they could not afford to marry. His fourth novel, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, published in 1874, was a big success. This allowed him to become a full-time writer and to marry. Hardy wrote several more novels, among them *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, published in 1886. He and Emma lived in Dorset, but they spent part of every year in London, where they mixed with literary people and Hardy was much admired. Although Hardy's books were very popular, when *Jude the Obscure* appeared in 1896, people hated it. They thought it was an attack on marriage, and found it shocking and immoral. Hardy turned to poetry and never wrote another novel. He died in 1928. Some biographers portray him as snobbish, mean and hateful towards women. Others believe he was a sensitive man who cared deeply about the human condition.

Summary

Young, poor Michael Henchard feels trapped by his wife and child and one night gets drunk at a fair and sells them to a stranger called Newson. Horrified by what he has done, he swears not to touch alcohol for twenty years. Eighteen years later he is the mayor of Casterbridge and a successful businessman. Believing Newson is dead, his wife, Susan, and daughter, Elizabeth-Jane, arrive in

Casterbridge to find Henchard because she has no money. He marries her again and they have a short happy life together. Farfrae, a young man with modern business ideas, arrives at the same time and becomes Henchard's farm manager. Susan dies, and Henchard learns that Elizabeth-Jane is really Newson's daughter. Henchard falls out with Farfrae, who sets up a rival business, and soon outdoes him. A woman from Henchard's past, Lucetta, comes to Casterbridge. Henchard now wants to marry her, but she and Farfrae fall in love. Henchard's business fails and he loses his house so he starts drinking again. Lucetta dies of shock after the local people make fun of her and Henchard in public. He sees that he will now lose his 'daughter' as well as everything else. He leaves Casterbridge on foot. He is penniless and has lost his family – just as at the beginning of the story. Elizabeth-Jane remains loyal to Henchard, but he dies before she can find him.

Chapter 1: Henchard, a farm worker aged twenty, has a family, no job and no home. He gets drunk and sells his wife and child for five guineas to a sailor named Newson at a fair. Devastated at what he has done, he looks for them without success. Henchard makes a solemn promise not to touch alcohol for twenty years.

Chapter 2: Susan, widowed and poor, and her eighteen-year-old daughter, Elizabeth-Jane arrive in Casterbridge to find Henchard. She is relieved to find he is now the Mayor and a businessman who needs a corn manager for his growing business.

Chapter 3: Henchard employs Farfrae, a handsome innovative Scotsman as corn manager and the business improves. He also meets Susan and devises a plan so that the townspeople do not find their marriage strange. He draws closer to Farfrae and tells him about his past; including a woman in Jersey he promised to marry.

Chapter 4: Henchard marries Susan, but she is reluctant to have her daughter's last name changed. He and Farfrae disagree publicly over a worker. Henchard is jealous and organises a rival entertainment day to Farfrae's, but it fails. Farfrae leaves him and sets up a rival business. Susan dies but leaves a letter with the truth about her daughter.

Chapter 5: Henchard tells Elizabeth-Jane what happened at the fair twenty years ago but reads in Susan's letter that she is really Newson's daughter. He begins to treat her coldly, and even encourages Farfrae to see her. Elizabeth-Jane meets a woman at her mother's grave who is friendly and offers her to share her house.



The Mayor of Casterbridge

Chapter 6: Lucetta, the woman from Jersey, has inherited property in Casterbridge and has employed Elizabeth-Jane as a housekeeper. Henchard tries to see her but they fail to meet. Farfrae calls in to see Elizabeth-Jane, who is out. He likes Lucetta and she loses interest in Henchard.

Chapter 7: Henchard goes bankrupt because of the weather and his own impatience while Farfrae's business succeeds. Henchard realises he and Farfrae compete for Lucetta's love, so he threatens her with making their past public so that she accepts his proposal of marriage.

Chapter 8: Henchard agrees to postpone their wedding if Lucetta helps him buy some time to repay a debt to Grower. She can't because she has secretly married Farfrae and Grower acted as witness.

Chapter 9: Henchard claims the letters from his safe, and reads them out to Farfrae without disclosing the sender. He promises Lucetta to give them back to her and asks Jopp to deliver them.

Chapter 10: Jopp asks Lucetta to help him become her husband's manager but she refuses. In a pub, he reads out the letters to two women and they plan a skimmity-ride in town to scorn Lucetta and Henchard.

Chapter 11: A member of the Royal family visits the town but Henchard is not allowed to greet him. Hurt, Henchard fights Farfrae in a barn but cannot bring himself to kill him.

Chapter 12: Henchard is back in town to see the ride. Farfrae does not see the ride because he is lured away from town but Lucetta dies of the shock.

Chapter 13: Henchard and Elizabeth-Jane live together happily. Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae renew their relationship and get married. Newson returns and tells his daughter the truth, which makes her very happy.

Henchard leaves the town.

Chapter 14: Elizabeth-Jane marries Farfrae and tries to find her father to take care of him but he dies before she can find him.

The original text

The novel first appeared serially, in twenty instalments, in 1886 in *The Graphic*, an English periodical and simultaneously in the United States. The book appeared as soon as the serial publication was complete but it differs a lot from the serial novel. It has been adapted for TV as a miniseries.

Background and themes

Where the story came from: Hardy claims the story was inspired by three actual events: the sale of a wife by her husband reported in a local newspaper, the uncertain harvests and the visit of Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's husband, to Dorchester, the town upon which Casterbridge is based, in 1849.

Fight with self: The main theme of the book is Henchard's fight against two things: his own character and chance. As he fights with himself, his actions and decisions affect other people's lives, usually badly. He often allows negative feelings to overwhelm him – at the beginning when things seem so bad he sells his wife. He is always honest in business, but not always kind; he is often impatient and quick to anger, but he is capable of great love and great loneliness. His complex character creates uncertainty in the reader – should we feel sorry for him or does he deserve everything that happens to him?

Chance: Chance plays an important part throughout the story: the chance appearance of Newson in the tent when Henchard is trying to sell his wife; the rain that spoils Henchard's fair; the August weather that ruins Henchard's business; the chance meeting between Farfrae and Lucetta when they fall in love. Hardy believes that although Henchard is a powerful character, he is never fully in control of his life.

Alcohol also has a role here. Henchard's life improves when he stops drinking; as he devotes himself to work, builds a successful business and eventually becomes mayor. Once he starts again, he loses his pride and his judgement.

Traditional versus modern: The two men represent contrasting ways of life in the country. Henchard is traditional and old-fashioned. Farfrae is young and modern. Hardy was always fascinated by country customs and ways. He often includes strange country rituals like the skimmity-ride in his novels. They make useful plot devices and allow him to paint pictures of colourful but less important characters. He also uses them to reveal the conservative side of society, which can be very cruel to people who fall outside its strict rules of moral behaviour. Lucetta dies because of the skimmity joke. This breaking of the moral code becomes a very important theme in Hardy's later novels, which shocked the reading public and ended Hardy's novel-writing career.



The Mayor of Casterbridge

Discussion activities

Before reading

- Group work:** Students work in groups. Each group chooses an important person in their local community, e.g. a factory owner, the mayor, the chief of police, a magistrate. They then decide on a terrible secret in the past of their character. They discuss the details of the secret without other students overhearing. The class then questions each group in turn to try and find out what the secret is. Groups have to answer as truthfully as they can.
- Read carefully:** Read the Introduction on pages v–vii. Make a chart of the events of Thomas Hardy's life. Use these dates:
1840 1871 1886 1895 1913 1914 1928
Example: 1840 Thomas Hardy is born in Dorset.

Chapter 1

While reading

- Pair work:** (after page 4) Michael is offering his wife for a little money at the fair. Ask students in pairs to make a list of the things they could say to persuade Michael to keep quiet.
- Discuss:** (page 6) Michael makes a formal promise not to drink alcohol for twenty years. Ask students to discuss the following: *How hard will this be for Michael? Have you ever made a promise that was hard to keep?*

After reading

- Role play:** Susan leaves the fair with the sailor. How do they feel? What do they say to each other as they walk along the road? Ask students to role play the conversation between them.

Chapter 2

Before reading

- Guess:** Tell students that eighteen years have passed after Henchard's promise not to drink for twenty years. Ask students to guess what has become of Henchard's life. Will he ever find his family again?

While reading

- Discuss:** (page 9) Ask students to discuss how Susan's life might have been different if she had not left with the sailor eighteen years before. Would her life have been better?
- Role play:** (after reading aloud the first paragraph on page 15) Casterbridge was a very quiet town in Hardy's day. Communications with big cities like London and Portsmouth were slow and difficult. So when Farfrae arrives, a visitor from Scotland, it is a big event. Farfrae is in the bar at the King of Prussia. One student is Farfrae. Other students are customers. What do they ask him? Ask them to role play the conversation in small groups.

After reading

- Pair work:** Henchard wants to persuade Farfrae to stay and work with him. How can he do this? Ask students in pairs to write down reasons why Farfrae should stay in Casterbridge. Then they prepare a short speech and give it to the rest of the class. Finally, have a class vote for the most convincing speech.
- Discuss:** Ask students to discuss the following: *How do you think people in Casterbridge would react if they knew that the mayor had sold his wife twenty years before? How has this changed in present days? Are citizens' decisions influenced by the private life of their authorities?*

Chapters 3–4

Before reading

- Discuss:** Ask students to discuss the following: *What about Farfrae has attracted Henchard? Why would he be interested in him?*

While reading

- Write:** (after Chapter 3) After he learns about Lucetta and Henchard, Farfrae advises him to write a letter to the young woman explaining to her why he is no longer available to keep his word and marry her. He even helps him do so. Ask students in pairs to write the letter from Henchard to Lucetta.
- Role play:** (page 21) Ask students to pretend they are ordinary townspeople at Henchard and Susan's wedding. They are very surprised by the wedding. Ask them to role play the conversation in pairs.
- Guess:** (page 23) Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane receive notes for a secret meeting in a barn. Neither of them has written the note for the other. Ask students to guess who may have wanted them to meet and therefore written the notes. What motive might that person have?
- Discuss:** (page 24) Henchard and Farfrae argue over how to treat a worker. Ask students to discuss how different their approaches to management are. How can they be described? If they were a worker, who would they prefer as a manager?

After reading

- Group work:** Put students in small groups. Ask them to discuss how these sets of relationships change in this section of the book: Susan and Henchard; Henchard and Farfrae; Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae; Elizabeth-Jane and Henchard. After their discussions, groups report back to the class.

Chapters 5–6

Before reading

- Discuss:** Ask students to discuss these questions with a partner.
 - Who is the 'woman in black'?*
 - The next chapter is called 'Love at First Sight'. Which two characters will fall in love at first sight?*



The Mayor of Casterbridge

While reading

- 18 Group work:** (page 33) Henchard has just been told that he will not be offered the position of mayor again. Farfrae has been chosen instead. Ask students in groups to discuss which candidate would be a better mayor and to give reasons for their choice. Then they share their ideas with the class.
- 19 Role play:** (page 35) Elizabeth-Jane is sitting by her mother's grave, reading. A woman she has never met before approaches and they start talking. She tells her about her life before and after Casterbridge. Ask students in pairs to role play this conversation. Remind them the woman ends up hiring her as a housekeeper.
- 20 Discuss:** (page 40) Will the new planting machine be good for the people of Casterbridge or bad? Ask students to take a minute and write arguments for and against new machinery. Then they share their ideas with other students.

After reading

- 21 Discuss:** Elizabeth-Jane wonders why Lucetta did not trust her with the truth. Ask students in pairs or small groups to try to respond to this question. Then they compare their views with other students.

Chapters 7–8

Before reading

- 22 Guess:** Ask students to discuss who the title of the chapter may refer to, when it comes to love. Who are the women involved?

While reading

- 23 Group work:** (page 44) Ask students in small groups to list the mistakes or miscalculations Henchard made as regards his business. What did he do wrong? What shouldn't he have done? What should he have done instead? Encourage them to give reasons for their answers. Then they share their lists with the rest of the class. Do they have similar ideas?
- 24 Discuss:** Invite students to read aloud the incident on page 45 between the two drivers. Discuss with students how this incident reflects the wider situation between Henchard and Farfrae. Record ideas on the board.
- 25 Discuss:** (page 47) Ask students to discuss the following questions:
How does Henchard force Lucetta to agree to marry him? Was she right in accepting the proposal? Did she have any other way out? How will Farfrae feel about this?
- 26 Discuss:** (page 53) Ask students to discuss the following questions in pairs or small groups: *What emotions does Henchard feel when he learns of Lucetta's marriage to Farfrae? Will he keep quiet about their past relationship?* Then they share their ideas with the rest of the class.

After reading

- 27 Group work:** Wealth (or the absence of it) plays an important role in the novel. For example, Henchard's interest in Lucetta grows now that she is wealthy and independent. Ask students to work in groups. Assign each group a character (Henchard, Susan, Lucetta, Elizabeth-Jane, Farfrae). Students discuss how money and wealth have changed their character. Are they better off with money? Are they happier? Then they share their views.

Chapters 9–10

Before reading

- 28 Guess:** Ask students to guess how Henchard might react to Lucetta's rejection.

While reading

- 29 Pair work:** (page 55) Ask students in pairs to discuss the following questions:
How do Henchard's and Farfrae's management styles differ? What kind of manager would you like to have if you were an employee?
- 30 Role play:** (page 59) Elizabeth-Jane stops Farfrae in the street and warns him about Henchard's feelings but he does not take her seriously. Ask students to role play this conversation.
- 31 Discuss:** (page 66) Mrs Cuxsom and Nance Mockridge plan the skimmity-ride after they listen to Jopp read out the letters. They want to teach Mrs Farfrae a lesson using an old tradition. Ask students to discuss the following: *How would people in your country shame others today?*

After reading

- 32 Group work:** Students compare events in the lives of Henchard and Farfrae by making a good/bad list for each of the two men. Divide the class into four groups. Each group takes and completes one section of the list. Groups report back to the class, writing their ideas in list form on the board. As a follow-up, students write a paragraph comparing the fortunes of the two men.

Chapters 11–12

Before reading

- 33 Discuss:** Farfrae has just been offered the position of mayor. Ask students to discuss these questions: *Do you think he will agree? Why/why not?*

While reading

- 34 Role play:** Ask students to imagine that they are standing in the crowd watching the royal visit. They role play a conversation about what they see.
- 35 Discuss:** Henchard tries to deal with his hurt pride by fighting Farfrae. Ask students to discuss the following: *Why does he do this and why does he stop before he kills Farfrae?* They write down some ideas to share with the rest of the class.



The Mayor of Casterbridge

36 Guess: Ask students to guess the following: *What do you think the sounds Henchard can hear at the end of Chapter 11 are?* Ask them to share their ideas with the other students.

After reading

37 Research: Ask students to research and prepare a description of a custom from their part of the world and bring it to the next lesson. Compare customs, including the skimmity ride. Talk about their specific purpose and any wider functions these customs perform within communities.

Chapters 13–14

Before reading

38 Group work: Ask students in groups to guess what happens to the following characters: Farfrae, Henchard, Elizabeth-Jane, Jopp. Assign each group a different character. Then they tell the class about their character.

While reading

39 Role play: (page 81) Newson returns and, with Farfrae's help, meets Elizabeth-Jane, who was very happy to see him. Ask students in pairs to role play the conversation in which they catch up on the long time they have been apart. Encourage them to include as much information from the last paragraph of Chapter 13 as possible.

40 Group work: (page 82) Elizabeth-Jane and Farfrae search for Henchard. They describe him to the people in the towns nearby. Ask students in small groups to agree on a few phrases that would describe Henchard. Then they write their descriptive paragraph and read it out to the rest. Have they written similar descriptions?

After reading

41 Discuss: Abe Whittle speaks very fondly about Henchard, although, he says, 'he was often rough with me'. Does Hardy want us to think Henchard was a good man or a bad man, or that chance can turn a man either way?

Extra activities

42 Pair work: Students work in pairs. Write the names of these characters on separate slips of paper and fold them up: Michael Henchard, Donald Farfrae, Susan Henchard, Richard Newson, Lucetta, Elizabeth-Jane, Joshua Jopp, the firmity woman, Abe Whittle, Nance Mockridge. Hand them out at random, one for each pair. Pairs write one or two sentences describing their character without mentioning his or her name and trying not to make the answer too obvious. Pairs read their descriptions aloud – the class guesses who the character is.

43 Discuss: In Chapter 3, we learn that Susan agrees to marry Henchard again but she has not been able to forgive him. He says: 'You can judge me by my future actions, not my past.' Ask students to discuss the following questions:

What would she think of him if she were alive? What did his actions reveal about the kind of man he was?

44 Discuss: Emotions are important in the novel. They can make characters take the wrong decisions if they act under them. If they had stopped to think instead of acting on impulse, many problems would have been avoided. Ask students to discuss how emotions lead Henchard to the wrong choices both in business and in love throughout the novel.

45 Discuss: Hardy says Elizabeth-Jane was aware of the important part that chance plays in our lives. Ask students to discuss how this applies to their lives. Use these questions as a guide: *Has chance ever decided something for you? Have you ever met someone you became close to by chance?*

Vocabulary activities

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