

The following pages contain some ideas for teaching Hardy's *Return of the Native* at KS5. Included are several essay titles, and a number of research tasks for small groups leading to presentations on themes, characters and essay plans.



1. Group essay planning: Research, select, plan, find quotations etc. Photocopy for group and present. Homework: actually write the essay (or perhaps in timed conditions).
2. Create Wall Charts: on Eustacia, Clym, the Heath, Myth and Legend, Classicism, Hardy's Wessex, Victorian Society etc.
3. Trial scenario. Who is to blame for the tragedy of *Return of the Native*? Hot seating of central characters questioned by rest of group. Group decision after considering responses.
4. Variety of perspective: How would Eustacia have described Thomasin and Venn's marriage? What would Mrs Yeobright have thought of Eustacia's death? As Mrs Yeobright describe Eustacia, as Wildeve describe Clym, as Susan describe Eustacia etc.
5. Make chronologically correct timeline. Mark on it where text deviates, noting flashbacks, speeding up techniques, omissions, summaries, slowing down techniques. Examine how Hardy has arranged time, sequence and pace to sustain interest, convey themes, to meet needs of serialisation.
6. For each character compile a textual study, showing where the character is presented in a favourable/unfavourable light or where the narrator makes a moral judgement on the character. How does this affect our perception of the character?
7. Make a character timeline. Chart moments of dramatic intensity, experiences, turning points etc.
8. Focus on language. Does Hardy create a different voice for each character? Give cut up speeches/descriptions to students who must identify who is speaking, being spoken about. Identify language which each character is couched in eg. Bird references for Thomasin, supernatural for Eustacia. Compile a Hardy wordbank from this.
9. Identify the themes of the novel and make a presentation to the class. Include historical research, quotations, language used, how theme is connected to character etc. Study the themes as you would a character.

The Return of the Native

Essay Titles: AS Level

1. Considering the themes and events of *The Return of the Native*, what criticisms do you think Hardy is making of the society he lived in?
2. Discuss the significance of location in *The Return of the Native*.
3. How far can Eustacia be called a classic romantic heroine?
4. Comment on the function of the rustics in *The Return of the Native*.
5. Examine the part played by nature in *The Return of the Native*.
6. "The Heath is as much a central character in the novel as Eustacia or Clym". Discuss.
7. Examine the role of the supernatural and fate in *The Return of the Native*.



The outcome of this research assignment will be a presentation to the rest of the group accompanied by an appropriate essay plan. Use the original character analysis sheet as a rough guide initially, then address the following subheadings. Answer the essay question as deeply as you can, and ensure you incorporate quotations and page references into your presentation.

"The Heath is as much a central character in the novel as Eustacia or Clym" Discuss with reference to the entire action of the novel.

1. How does the Heath pervade the lives of its inhabitants? Consider its place as a natural resource/source of life/means of earning a living. For Eustacia it means many things: a prison yet also a place of liberation and sexual freedom.
2. Consider the use of the Heath as a stage for the central action. What happens on the Heath? How do the forces of nature effect the unfolding drama? Do you think nature holds some responsibility for the action?
3. Look at the language used to describe the Heath. Does it personify it? Are there classical references used in its portrayal? Is it described endowed with erotic/sensual/brutal qualities? Does its representation change?
4. Consider the Heath's role in the action of the novel: Mrs Yeobright's death/Clym's career change/Eustacia and Wildeve's deaths/Rural tradition: the heath as a focus for the community, through its ancient traditions but also a place of personal liberation.
5. Compare Hardy's Heath with Bronte's representation of the moors in *Wuthering Heights*. Both offer the central characters a stage for action unfettered by social constraints, where social rules don't apply. Both pervade the action of the novel. Is the language used similar?
6. Answer the essay question. How important is the Heath to the novel? Remember to continually base your response with quotations and reference to the text.

Myth, Legend and Classical Tragedy

The outcome of this research project will be a seminar presentation and an appropriate handout for the other members of the group. When researching each subheading be sure to relate the information you discover to the actual novel. Use quotations to contrast or illustrate your points.

1. Research the scope of mythical reference used in the novel. Find examples and use quotations. How do these classical references effect our perception of character/landscape/action/feeling/narrative? Do they glorify/undermine/create humour? Do they legitimise Eustacia's actions? Do they lend the plot a greater cultural/moral weight?
2. Think about Hardy's readership. How do these cultural references effect the reader's perception of Hardy? Some critics called him pretentious. Do you agree? Would the Victorian reader understand the classical references? You may need to look at Victorian history to answer this.
3. Create a "tragic" terminology wordbank. Research and compile a table of classical words, such as *hamartia*, *catharsis*, *hubris* and *chorus*. Then match these with examples from the text. How far do these classical models fit Hardy's tragedy?
4. Aristotle's definition of tragedy. Summarize this. How far does Hardy deviate/concur with this classical form? Is *The Return of the Native* a tragedy? Again, find quotations.
5. Fate. What is fate? How is it represented classically? How far does fate influence the action of the novel? Or are the characters in control of their own destinies?
6. The Chorus. What was the function of the Chorus in the Greek theatre? How did they speak? What did they look like? How are the rustics in the novel choric? Examine their function as storytellers/action movers/observers who comment on the main action etc. Find examples form the text to back up your points. What do the rustics add to the novel?
7. The Tragic Hero/ine. What was the classical model? How far can Clym/Wildeve/Eustacia be called tragic heroes?



The outcome of this research project will be an actual timeline charting the events of the novel, noting where the action speeds up or slows down, where Hardy incorporates flashbacks or focus techniques, and where there are deliberate omissions. This will be accompanied by a presentation to the group explaining your findings, using appropriate handouts. Remember to refer to the text wherever possible, and use page references and quotations to illustrate your observations.

1. Sort out the time frame of the novel. When is it set? Place the seasonal events in order on it: the mumming, the maypole etc.
2. Place the action of the story on to it: Clym's arrival, Eustacia and Wildeve's meetings, Thomasin's baby, the gambling, the night of the deaths etc.
3. List also what is missing from the action of the novel: Thomasin and Wildeve's first "wedding", Eustacia and Clym's wedding, Thomasin's pregnancy, happy weeks of Eustacia and Clym's marriage, sexual (?) meetings between Eustacia and Wildeve, scenes between Thomasin and Wildeve (eg. discussion about the money...) etc. What do some of these omissions tell you about Victorian society?
4. Note Hardy's use of flashbacks: Venn and Thomasin's previous relationship told through what?
5. What are the events central to the novel? How can we tell? Does Hardy lend them importance by spending a lot of time describing them? Find examples to prove your point. Which events take the longest to explain? How does Hardy keep our focus and interest?
6. When does Hardy use "slow-motion" techniques? Look particularly at his establishment of character, and on the introduction to the Heath. What effect does this lengthy introduction have on our perception of the character?
7. How is anticipation for Clym's arrival created? Look at linguistic techniques (time, focus, reflection, the half glimpse on the road), and also through the eyes of different characters. Look at Eustacia's preparations for their first meeting. Where else is tension created through structure?
8. Hardy's manipulation of time and focus. How does Hardy's use of these techniques effect our perception of character/action/landscape? For instance, examine the speed at which Hardy races through book six. What does this tell you about the importance of the ending?



The outcome of this research activity will be a detailed essay plan which will be presented to the class, accompanied by an appropriate handout. Try and refer to Hardy's text wherever suitable and include quotations/page references on your handout.

"A Marginal, solitary status in conflict with her surrounding community, her insistence on her own moral values rather than those to hand around her, her yearning for more than can be yielded by her society".

Penny Boumelha claims that these are the characteristics which Eustacia Vye shares with "the archetypal Romantic hero". How far do you agree that Eustacia, Clym and Wildeve are models of the classic Romantic hero?

1. Romanticism. In order to answer the essay question you first need to research Romanticism. Here are some ideas to focus your initial study: what was it? When was it? What characterised it? Which art forms did it touch? What was the historical context? Who were the key authors/figures/fictional characters? What were the key works?
2. Hardy. How would this tradition have affected Hardy? Was this his literary heritage? Did he read Romantic works? Can we see evidence of Romanticism in the action of the novel?
3. What does it mean to be a Romantic Hero/heroine? What does the archetype do? What do they look like? What relationships do they have? How are they represented in language? Does the reader approve of their actions? How were Romantic texts received by the readership?
4. Find archetypal examples from Romantic texts: look at E. Bronte *Wuthering Heights*, C. Bronte *Jane Eyre*, Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Jane Austen *Pride and Prejudice*. Looking at Romantic poetry might be extremely helpful, as well as at the lifestyles of poets such as Byron and Shelley.
5. How does the Romantic literary tradition apply to *The Return of the Native*? Find evidence for Romanticism, and evidence against it. Use quotations to back up your points.
6. Answer the question. Can the central characters be classified neatly as "Romantic", or are they caught between genres as Penny Boumelha might argue?



Thomas Hardy and Wessex

The outcome of this research project will be a seminar presentation and an appropriate handout for the other members of the group. When researching each of the subheadings try and ensure that you keep relating your findings with the actual events of the novel. Include quotations to contrast or illustrate your historical findings.

- Hardy and the land. Where did Hardy come up with the idea of "Wessex". What was the original Wessex? What effect does the original source have on our perception of Hardy's Wessex?
- Hardy's Biography. How does Hardy relate to the land he calls Wessex? Consider his youth, marriage, lifestyle. Looking at some of Hardy's poetry might help you get an idea of his relationship with the land. How does he write about the land in the novel? Consider his style, vocabulary, tone. Is he respectful/celebratory/sensual in his illustration?
- What does Wessex actually look like? To find this you will have to identify where Wessex actually is and research its Victorian landscape. How wild was the Heath? What lived there? What was life like in the middle of rural Wessex? How did the people earn a living? What were the natural resources of the area?
- How do the characters in the novel relate to the Heath? Consider Eustacia's ambivalent relationship: she longs to escape it, yet it allows her the freedom to conduct her affair with Wildeve. Consider Venn's relationship to it, and Clym's changing relationship with it also.
- Religion in Wessex. What was the prevailing religion of the time? Who went to Church and why? What influence did the Church have on rural life? How does paganism touch the events of the novel? How ancient is paganism? Where can we see evidence of the importance of pagan ritual throughout the novel? What does this tell us about modernity and rural life?
- Rural Tradition: research furze-cutting, reddenmen, bonfire rituals, mumming, maypole dancing, witchcraft and its practices (eg. effigies and piercing), hair-cutting, giving the feather bed. What would these images tell the reader about rural life in Wessex - that it is based in tradition, or backward and pagan?



Victorian Society and *The Return of the Native*

The outcome of this research project will be a seminar presentation and a detailed handout. When researching each subheading remember to link the historical information with the actual text. Hardy specifically set the story in 1840; what implications does this moment in history have for the events and themes within the novel? Include quotations from the novel to back up or illustrate your historical findings.

- The Literary World: How do the literary conventions of the time affect Hardy's novel? (consider serialisation/inappropriate themes/the "happy" ending)
- Class: How was early Victorian society constructed? Were there any opportunities for social mobility (consider Venn). How do the characters of the novel fit in to the social hierarchy? Think about the differences between the Yeobrights, the Vyes, the Heath Folk, Wildeve and Venn.
- Money: How was wealth distributed? How did the inheritance laws work? (Wildeve) What did people spend their money on?
- Women: This is a central issue in the novel. What was the position of women throughout the social hierarchy? Where do the women of the novel fit in? What was the female relationship with money? (Thomasin) What about the status of women within marriage? How were unmarried women perceived? Why is Mrs Yeobright so concerned that Thomasin should be married after the initial fiasco? Consider also the representation of female sexuality; how scandalous are Eustacia's actions in relation to the contemporary society? What is Hardy saying about the position of Women?
- Education: This is a theme central to our understanding of Clym. What was the educational system like in 1840? Was everybody educated equally? (boys/girls/rich/poor) Are Clym's intentions to educate the Heath Folk fanciful/idealistic? Which kind of people became teachers? Is this a downward move for Clym to make? What do the Heath Folk think about being educated?
- Expansion of towns and cities: Why does Eustacia want to leave Egdon - what has Paris got that Egdon doesn't? Consider the Arts, the effect of industrialisation on the quality of urban life, possibility for social advance. Is there a tension between urban and rural life?

