

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

Tess of the d'Urbervilles

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Phase the First

The Maiden

1. Jack Durbeyfield is surprised and delighted when Parson Tringham informs him that he is descended from the distinguished, but almost extinct, d'Urberville family. In spite of his impoverished circumstances, Jack soon puts on airs, giving orders to a passerby and summoning a carriage from the inn. Have you experienced someone putting on airs, pretending to be something other than he or she really is? Was the pretense funny or sad? Describe the person and the pretense and your reaction to what was being done as well as any consequences of the performance.
2. As the narrator describes the young girls of Marlott in their annual “club-walking” ritual in the bright May sunshine, he writes that “each had a private little sun for her soul to bask in; some dream, some affection, some hobby, at least some remote and distant hope which, though perhaps starving to nothing, still lived on, as hopes will.” Can you identify with his description of these young girls? Does your private sun shine on some interior hope or dream? If so, describe in a journal entry or, if you prefer in a poem, how you came by it, and how it might some day come to fruition in a journal.
3. Tess is embarrassed in front of the other girls as her father drives by in his rented carriage. Children, and more especially teenagers, often feel embarrassed by their parents. Have you had that experience? Can you remember what caused you to feel that way and how you feel looking back on it now? Write about your experience. Try to describe how you felt at the time and how you feel about it now.
4. Abraham reveals the plan that Tess’ parents have hatched to try and marry her off to a rich man without any consideration of her opinion in the matter. As Tess, write a letter to a friend detailing your thoughts on the plan and how you feel about what your parents propose to do with your life.

Response Journal

5. Based on the description of the first meeting of Tess and Alec d'Urberville, draw a verbal portrait of d'Urberville describing as closely as you can his physical appearance as well as the impression his introduction has made on you. Explain why the impression was favorable or unfavorable.
6. Tess is reluctant take a position with the Stoke-d'Urbervilles when her mother presses her to do so. Write a dialogue between Tess and a girlfriend, exploring her reluctance. It might begin:

Friend: Tess, I hear you've been offered a fine position with the D'Urberville family.

7. After Tess leaves home, her mother expresses reservations to her father about the wealthy young "relative" who has taken Tess away. She tells Mr. Durbeyfield that perhaps she ought to have found out more about him. What kind of parents do you think Mr. and Mrs. Durbeyfield are based on the story so far and their treatment of Tess? Write a paragraph or two expressing your opinion of them and contrasting them with your own parents.
8. Alec d'Urberville's physical appearance is described extensively when he and Tess first meet. What further impressions of him are conveyed by his driving Tess to her new home? Does he seem more engaging or less likable? First impressions are often, though not always, a reliable indicator. Describe an experience you've had with meeting a person for the first time and how subsequent interaction has confirmed or changed your first impressions.
9. Tess is frustrated by her initial inability to resume whistling, until coached by d'Urberville. Imagine you are Tess and write an entry in your journal, describing how you felt about your ineptitude in front of Alec when he appeared and about your uneasiness in having him tutor you in the art of whistling.

Tess of the d'Urbervilles

10. Heavy drinking by Tess's father had produced painful consequences for her and her family. Returning home from the Saturday trip to Chaseborough, she experiences further difficulties as a result of the excessive drinking of her companions. Occurrences such as these led to the passage of the Prohibition Amendment to the United States Constitution in an effort to eliminate the scourge of "Demon Rum," but prohibition proved to be a failed remedy. What has been your experience of the use and abuse of alcohol? Has it proven to be a problem among your own social circle? Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper reflecting on the problem as you experience it in your community today with your suggestions as to how the problem might be addressed.

11. Tess experiences a continuing uneasiness about d'Urberville's attentions to her and his sexual advances. In her sleeping innocence, he takes advantage of her and forever alters her future. Date rape, often fueled by excessive drinking, is a much discussed problem today. Imagine that you are a twenty-first century Tess. Write a recap of your experience that night and your feelings. Describe the options open to you and the course that you intend to follow as a result of your experience.

Phase the Second

Maiden No More

12. When Tess returns home, she rails at her mother, “Why didn’t you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn’t you warn me?” In an age that is struggling to deal with epidemics of socially transmitted diseases, there is more pressing need than ever for parents to educate their children about responsible sexual behavior. Write a letter to a parenting magazine expressing your feelings on the subject. Explain what you feel is the responsibility of a parent today in the matter and how that responsibility can best be carried out.
13. Consumed with guilt over her sojourn in Trantridge, Tess withdraws from town life into a solitary existence. Have you ever had the need to be alone? Write a few paragraphs about what made you feel that need and how you dealt with it.
14. Tess returns from the harvesting to find that her tiny baby has taken ill, and she is overwhelmed by concern that the baby will die unbaptized. “She thought of the child consigned to the nethermost corner of hell as its double doom for lack of baptism and lack of legitimacy.” Do you feel her fears were well-founded or merely superstitious? In a few paragraphs, write about your thoughts on the afterlife and what you feel might be the prerequisites for it.
15. “To escape the past and all that appertained thereto was to annihilate it, and to do that she would have to get away.” As Tess, write a journal entry describing why you feel the need to leave Marlott and what you hope will happen in your life by making such a move.

Phase the Third

The Rally

16. Tess finds her spirits lifted as she enters the Vale of Little Dairies. “The irresistible, universal, automatic tendency to find sweet pleasure somewhere, which pervades all life, from the meanest to the highest, had at length mastered Tess.” Write a letter from Tess to her mother with a description of the Vale as well as her feelings upon arriving there and her hopes for the future.

17. The dairyman’s story about the fiddler charming a bull is met with a skeptical response by another milker. Have you had a similar experience of being told a tale which the teller believes to be true, but the truth of which you found difficult to accept. Describe the tale and your reaction to it, as well as the reason you found it difficult to accept.

18. When Angel Clare arrives at the Talbothays Dairy, he finds the inhabitants much different than his expectations which had been formed by the caricatures of the popular press and the prejudices of his own class consciousness. Have you become acquainted with someone from a different economic or racial background and found your preconceptions challenged and altered? If so, describe your acquaintances and how your meeting them has changed your ideas.