

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Tess of the d'Urbervilles

by Thomas Hardy

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Introduction

Tess of the d'Urbervilles was initially published in a serial form because of the nature of its content. Victorian readership disapproved of novels containing seduction and violence. However, after its initial run as a serial, the novel was published as a three-volume book. Teachers should be aware that although the scene between Alec and Tess at Chaseborough is not explicit in its description of Alec's seduction, the implication is that a rape has occurred.

The teacher may find it helpful to explain the concept of the serialized novel in demonstrating the intricacy of Hardy's writing and to create a map in which to illustrate Tess's journey throughout England. Because setting is so important in the action of the novel, students should be familiar with England's landscape.

Several websites are available on the Internet that contain the illustrations that accompanied Hardy's publication of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. While the illustrations are not necessary in understanding the basic plot of the novel, oftentimes evaluating the connection between illustration and text can create deeper understanding for the reader.

Notes: All page references come from the Dover Thrift edition of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, copyright 2001. Note that the Dover edition capitalizes the "D" in the title and at the top of every page; we feel that this is not correct and use the lowercase "d" in the title.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. explain how Thomas Hardy feels about the divorce laws and rural life of the Victorian era based on his depictions of each.
2. explain Tess's and Angel's struggle with fate throughout the novel.
3. discuss the characterization of Tess as a good and noble woman.
4. discuss *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* as a work of tragedy.
5. define and cite examples of:
 - imagery
 - foreshadowing
 - symbolism
 - satire
 - irony
 - motif
 - theme
6. understand how the landscape and setting help influence and mirror the meaning in the text.
7. discuss how Tess is a victim of her social class.
8. discuss who was more responsible for Tess's final demise, Angel or Alec.
9. compare and contrast Alec d'Urberville and Angel Clare.
10. explain the type of narration Hardy uses in the novel and determine its effectiveness.
11. explain the effectiveness of omens as instances of foreshadowing throughout the novel.
12. compare and contrast Tess's life at Talbothay's Dairy and Flintcomb-Ash.
13. characterize the relationship between Angel and his father.
14. characterize the relationship between Tess and her parents.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Trace the instances of sleep throughout the novel. For each instance, explain who is sleeping and what happens after the person awakens. How does sleep seem to be a recurring motif throughout the novel?
2. Discuss the role of Fate in Tess's life. How does it determine Tess's actions and reactions to circumstances?
3. Who is the villain in the novel? Discuss who or what could be characterized as the antagonizing force? Is it appropriate or inappropriate to characterize both Alec and society as villains?
4. Explain the role of landscape or setting in the novel? How does the setting mirror the action in the story? Do seasonal changes act as symbols throughout the novel? Cite examples from the text as support, illustrating how the setting and action work in tandem.
5. How does the role of the narrator function in the novel? Does the narrator help or hinder the reader's understanding of both the events and the feelings of the characters?
6. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* is a novel of contrasts between what Tess is supposed to be and what she is. Explain the nature of this contrast. To which family (as representative of a societal group) does Tess belong, the d'Urbervilles or the Durbeyfields?
7. Compare and contrast Alec and Angel. Which of the characters do you consider to be most at fault in Tess's demise? Explain.
8. Explain the omens that are present in the novel. How do they affect the reader's understanding of Tess's demise?
9. Consider the significant places in which Tess resides. Compare and contrast each place. For example, consider Tess's life at Talbothay's Dairy versus Flintcomb-Ash.
10. Compare and contrast the relationship between Angel and his parents with the relationship of Tess and her parents.
11. Discuss Angel's inner conflicts when he learns of Tess's past.
12. Discuss Alec's success, or lack of success, in his seduction of Tess.
13. Explain why the novel can be classified as a tragedy. Is Tess a tragic heroine? Why or why not?

Tess of the d'Urbervilles

Preface to the Fifth and Later Editions

1. How does Hardy begin his preface?

2. Explain Hardy's intention, or lack of intention, when writing the novel.

3. Summarize the objections that some readers maintained with the novel.

4. What does the reader learn about the subtitle to the novel?

Chapter 4

VOCABULARY

genuflexions – bending at the knees, especially in worship
somnolent – sleepy
superfluous – unnecessary

1. Why do Tess's parents want to send her to claim their kin?

2. How does Tess's family attempt to make money, and how is this plan almost spoiled?

3. If you were in Tess's shoes, what would be your misgivings about being asked to deliver the beehives?

4. Explain the conversation Tess and her brother Abraham have about the stars.

PHASE THE SECOND – Maiden No More**Chapter 12**

VOCABULARY

amalgamating – unifying
edification – enlightening
luminosity – the brightness of light
propinquity – nearness

1. Explain the symbolism in the following statement: "...for since her eyes last fell upon it she had learnt that the serpent hisses where the sweet birds sing, and her views of life had been totally changed for her by the lesson."

2. What has transpired between Alec and Tess during the several weeks since Tess was raped?

3. Why was Alec looking for Tess, and why is he angry with her?

4. What is foreshadowed in the following lines: "...turning impetuously upon him, her eyes flashing as the latent spirit (of which he was to see more some day) awoke in her."

- 4. When Angel is home visiting his family, what do his parents and brothers notice about him? What does Angel notice about his brothers that is consistent with Angel's view of society? Find the narration in the story that supports this.

- 5. Based on Angel's parents' observations about his behavior, what conclusions can you make about the Victorian view of education?

- 6. Compare and contrast meal time at the dairy farm and meal time with the Clare family.

- 7. Based on the reader's observations of the Clare family, how is Angel different from his parents and brothers?

PHASE THE FIFTH – The Woman Pays

Chapter 35

VOCABULARY

auricular – private
prestidigitation – deception
transmutation – conversion

1. How does Angel react to Tess's confession? How does his response match your prediction? Explain why you agree or disagree with his response.

2. Why is Angel unable to forgive Tess?

3. How is Angel's perception of Tess different than before?

4. How is Angel's treatment of Tess different than one might expect?

Chapter 48

1. Alec returns as promised and walks Tess home. What does he ask her?

2. What is Tess's response?

3. Speculate what Angel would do if he knew the situation in which Tess currently finds herself.

4. Summarize Tess's letter to Angel and describe its tone. What words help Hardy achieve the tone?
