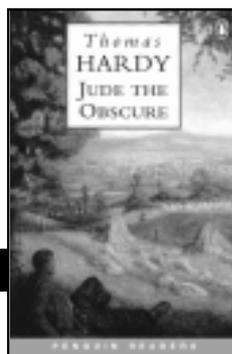


Teacher's notes

Jude the Obscure

by Thomas Hardy



SUMMARY

Jude the Obscure, published in 1896, shocked its readers for being 'indecent'. Deeply upset by the reaction to the book, Hardy never wrote another novel, but turned instead to poetry. Today, the book is a landmark in the history of the British novel, dealing with relationships between men and women with great realism. A film 'Jude' was made in 1996, starring the Oscar-winning Kate Winslet.

The novel tells the story of a poor, lonely orphan, Jude Fawley, who dreams of going to university and becoming a clergyman. Jude is trapped into marriage by Arabella, a barmaid, who then leaves him. He starts work as a stonemason and falls in love with his unconventional cousin, Sue Bridehead. Sue eventually returns Jude's feelings but, horrified to learn that he is married, she marries Phillotson, Jude's old schoolmaster. By now, Jude has given up all his ambitions. Sue eventually leaves Phillotson and lives with Jude, unmarried; they take in Jude's son by Arabella and have children of their own. But people gossip and it is hard to find work. Jude becomes ill and works as a cakemaker. Then his unhappy eldest son hangs himself and his two half-brothers. Feeling that God is punishing her for her sins, Sue returns to Phillotson, despite loving Jude. Arabella once again traps Jude into returning to her, and he dies a broken man.

ABOUT THOMAS HARDY

Thomas Hardy was born in 1840 in a village in Dorset, in the south-west of England. His father was a stonemason, and the family was not well-off, but his mother encouraged his interest in books and he trained as an architect. He worked in London and there lost his religious faith; as a boy he had wanted to be a clergyman. Hardy published his first novel, *Desperate Remedies*, in 1867. His fourth novel, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, published in 1874, was very successful, and Hardy was able to give up architecture for writing. He married the woman he loved, Emma Gifford, but it was not a happy marriage.

Between 1874 and the publication of *Jude the Obscure* in 1896, Hardy wrote twelve other novels. His greatest novels are agreed to be: *Far from the Madding Crowd*

(1874), *The Return of the Native* (1878), *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure*. His home was in Dorset, but he spent part of the year in London, where he mixed with literary people and was much admired. He never felt entirely comfortable in this society, however, and could never forget his country roots. A number of biographers have portrayed Hardy as a snobbish, mean pessimist and woman-hater. A recent, much praised biography, however, claims that this is wrong; it depicts Hardy as a sensitive man who cared deeply about his fellow beings.

Hardy became famous, but critics complained about the immorality and pessimism of his books. These complaints reached their height with the publication of *Jude the Obscure*, after which Hardy only wrote poetry. He had always regarded his poetry as more important than his fiction. After Emma's death, Hardy married his secretary, Emily Dugdale. In his later years he was given many public honours and today is considered to be a great poet as well as a great novelist. He died in 1928.

BACKGROUND AND THEMES

Hardy had a profound love of the countryside. All his major novels take place in an imaginary county called Wessex. Wessex is in fact Dorset - the county where Hardy was born and spent much of his life. During Hardy's lifetime, England was transformed from an agricultural society to an industrial one. Hardy's novels depict this transformation and its effect on country people; they were forced to move from town to town seeking work, becoming spiritually homeless. Hardy shows the uncertainty of their future; even the existence of God is questioned.

In his later novels, Hardy defied the moral conventions of the period; in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, for instance, the heroine has an illegitimate baby and murders her husband. A theme of Hardy's novels is that even wrongdoers should be treated with compassion, and that society in the 19th century was intolerant and cruel. These attitudes outraged many critics.

Hardy writes about relationships - often unhappy ones -

E

1

2

3

4

5

6

UPPER
INTERMEDIATE

JUDE THE OBSCURE



Teacher's notes

between men and women. His characters have affairs outside marriage but these are rarely satisfactory. Hardy's novels were criticized as 'immoral', but in fact his characters suffer because of their affairs. Hardy's crime in the eyes of the critics was that he presented the sinners as unhappy human beings rather than as wicked monsters. *Jude the Obscure* is a dark, tragic novel. However, the love between Jude and Sue shines out. In this novel, Hardy makes an impassioned plea for tolerance and understanding.

Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the Reader and supplement those exercises. Further supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book can be found in the photocopiable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of discussion pair/group work questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

- Put students into groups. Photocopy the pictures on pages 11, 17, 39 and 53 (one set of photocopies for each group). Cut out the caption beneath the pictures so that they are separate. Give each group the pictures and captions and ask them to match them up.
- In the same groups, students put the pictures in order so that they tell a story. Each group then tells the story, as they see it, to the class. Ask students to decide which is the best story.

ACTIVITIES WHILE READING THE BOOK

Chapters 1–8

- In groups, students write down seven facts about Jude Fawley. Then each group reads out their facts; each new fact is written on the board.
- In pairs, students answer the following questions
 - Why does Jude study Latin and Greek?
 - What kind of work does Jude decide to do?
 - 'Why was I ever born?' Why does Jude say this? What does this show about Jude?
 - Why does Jude have to marry Arabella?
- In pairs or groups, students decide which of these descriptions best fits Arabella. Students give reasons for their answers.
 - She is a kindhearted girl who loves Jude.
 - She is stupid and lazy.
 - She is selfish and dishonest.

Chapters 9–18

- In groups, students say which of the following adjectives describe Jude, and which describe Sue:

clever, unconventional, lazy, lively, religious, selfish, a dreamer, naive, weak, hardworking, sensitive, amusing, cold, loving, ambitious.

- In pairs, students act out the conversation between Jude and Arabella when they meet again.
- Ask students what they would do if they were Mr Phillotson. Would they let Sue go or not?

Chapters 19–30

- In groups, students discuss the following question: In *Jude the Obscure* Arabella destroys Jude's chances of happiness.
- In groups, students discuss the following question: Why does the boy Jude kill himself and his half-brothers?
- In pairs, students act out the farewell scene between Jude and Arabella.
- In groups, students discuss the following question: What do you think Arabella's feelings are on Jude's death?

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

- In small groups, students put the following themes in the book in order of importance and give their reasons.
 - Sex and the problems it causes
 - The injustice of 19th century life
 - Women and their manipulateness
 - How we cannot escape our destiny
- As a whole class activity, students discuss the following statement: *Jude the Obscure* is too pessimistic.

Glossary

It will be useful if your students know the following new words. They are practised in the 'Before You Read' sections at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English.)

Chapters 1–8

apprentice (n) someone who agrees to work for an employer for a fixed period of time in order to learn a particular skill or job

cottage (n) a small house in the country

dimissal (n) the act of removing someone from their job

lodgings (n) a house where you pay rent to the owner so that you can live in one of the rooms

obscure (adj) not at all well known; difficult to understand

spire (n) a roof that rises steeply to a point on top of a tower, especially on a church

stonemason (n) someone whose job is cutting stone into pieces to be used in building

trade (n) a particular job, especially one needing special skill with your hands

Chapters 9–18

divorce (n) the legal act of ending a marriage

headstone (n) a piece of stone on a grave on which the person's name is written

theological (adj) connected to the study of religion



Student's activities

Photocopiable

These activities can be done alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.

Activities before reading the book

- In pairs, look at the front cover of the book and answer these questions:
 - Where is the novel set?
 - What year do you think the events take place, approximately? How do you know this?
 - What is the young man doing and why is he looking at the town?

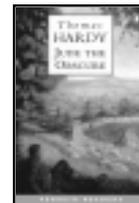
Now compare your answers with another pair.
- Read the Introduction to the book and answer these questions.
 - Where was Thomas Hardy born?
 - What job did he do before he became a writer?
 - Where does he set his novels?
 - What are the main themes of Hardy's novels?
 - When did Hardy die? How old was he?

Activities while reading the book

CHAPTERS 1-8

- Answer the following questions.
 - Who does Jude live with when he is a small boy?
 - Why does he get a job as a stonemason?
 - How does Jude meet Arabella?
 - What is the trick she plays on him?
 - Why does Arabella call Jude 'a tender-hearted fool'?
- Are these questions true or false?
 - Farmer Troughtham dismisses Jude because he is lazy.
 - Jude thinks that learning Latin and Greek will be easy.
 - Jude has to marry Arabella because she is going to have his baby.

Jude the Obscure



- Jude goes to Christminster two years after Arabella leaves him.
 - Jude knows what Sue looks like before he meets her.
 - Mr Phillotson recognises Jude immediately.
 - Jude leaves Christminster because he cannot get into university.
- Who says the following sentences? Complete the sentences.
 - You seem to know me
 - I don't remember
 - You told me to try
 - Why don't you try
 - Oh, he's too old
 - In groups write three questions about Chapter 8, then give your questions to another group to answer

CHAPTERS 9-18

- Are these sentences true or false. Correct the false ones.
 - Sue is happier in the college than she was in the shop.
 - Sue and Jude spend the night together when they miss the last train.
 - Jude's great-aunt told him that Fawley marriages are happy ones.
 - Phillotson agrees to let Sue live with Jude.
 - Phillotson asks Sue to come and see him when he is ill.
 - Phillotson agrees to leave the school.

E
1
2
3
4
5
6

UPPER
INTERMEDIATE

JUDE THE OBSCURE



Student's activities

- 2 Discuss whether you agree with the following statement and give your reasons: Thomas Hardy dislikes women.
- 3 Put these events in the correct order.
- Jude meets Arabella again.
 - Sue tells Jude that she is going to marry Mr Phillotson.
 - Sue runs away from the college.
 - Sue goes to Melchester.
 - Sue goes to live with Jude.
 - Aunt Drusilla dies.
 - Sue and Jude miss the train home.
 - Sue and Mr Phillotson are married.
 - Sue and Mr Phillotson agree to live separately.
- 4 Who says the following sentences. Who are they speaking to. What is the situation?
- 'I knew you'd be angry. We'd better not meet again.'
 - 'Absolutely. I swear it before God!'
 - 'I suppose because we two are in tune!'
 - 'It's a lesson I ought to learn at this Easter season.'
 - 'Good God, what will Shaston say?'
 - 'It's news to me that he has a wife.'

CHAPTERS 19-30

- 1 Who says the following sentences? Who are they speaking to? What is the situation?
- 'But I have the same old fear of a marriage contract.'
 - 'We must have him. I'll be a mother to him.'
 - 'He belongs to someone else.'
 - 'Why was I ever born?'
 - 'Done because we are too many.'
 - 'I loved you and you loved me, and we made our own contract.'
 - Don't follow me, don't look at me. Leave me alone, for pity's sake.'

- 2 Put the events in the correct order.
- Sue sees Phillotson in Christminster.
 - Jude and Sue move to Kennetbridge.
 - Sue and Phillotson remarry.
 - The boy Jude hangs himself and his half-brothers.
 - Sue visits Arabella at an inn.
 - Jude's son comes to Aldbrickham.
 - Arabella sees Jude and Sue at the show-ground.
 - Jude and Arabella remarry.
 - Jude finds out that he has a son.
 - Arabella's husband dies.
 - Arabella meets Phillotson.
- 3 In groups, discuss which of these emotions you feel at the end of the book.
- anger sadness surprise.
- Give your reasons

Activities after reading the book

- 1 In groups, discuss these questions.
- What do these characters feel that marriage means?
Jude Arabella Sue Mr Phillotson
- 2 Why do you think Hardy's novel was so shocking to the public when it was written? Do you find it shocking now? Why/Why not?
- 3 Which character in the novel do you feel most sympathy for. Give your reasons.

