

**Far from the Madding Crowd by Thomas Hardy****Before reading**

- 1 Ask students to read *About the story* and *About the author*. Write the title *Far from the Madding Crowd* on the board. Students work in pairs or small groups to discuss what they think is meant by the phrase 'madding crowd'. Encourage them to think of a word or words in English that are related to the word 'madding' (i.e. mad). Nominate pairs or groups to give their answers, then as a class elicit what kind of place 'far from the madding crowd' is. If necessary, prompt them to think about the kind of places where Hardy's novels are set (refer them to the 'About the author' section).

Answers

'Madding' is an old word for 'going mad'. The 'madding crowd' refers to a busy place with lots of people. 'Far from the madding crowd' therefore refers to a quiet, secluded place, such as the countryside.

i CULTURAL INFORMATION

Realism was a literary movement that replaced the movement of Romantic idealism in the 19th century. As the name suggests, it is a style of writing which attempts to show life as realistically as possible, and with great attention to detail. This is in contrast with the unrealistic nature of Romantic idealism. Because of the attention to detail and concern with showing the true nature of life, books written in this style focus more on the characters than the plot. Realism in the Victorian period (around 1837 to 1901) was especially concerned with the lives of ordinary working-class people, often those who lived in the countryside, such as the characters in *Far from the Madding Crowd*.

- 2 Ask students if they have heard of any other Thomas Hardy novels. Refer them to the words and ask them to work individually to try to work out three more of Hardy's novels. Students compare answers in pairs before checking as a class. If necessary, give students the first word of each novel.

Answers

Jude the Obscure
The Woodlanders
The Return of the Native

- 3 Write on the board 'Gabriel Oak' and explain that this is both the title of Chapter 1 and the name of one of the main characters. Read aloud the first line of text: *Farmer Gabriel Oak was a quiet, sensible man*. Ask students to predict some characteristics of Gabriel Oak based on this line and the information given in *About the story*. Elicit some ideas but don't confirm any predictions.

Answers

Students' own answers

While reading

- 1 Before students read the text, refer them to the *Vocabulary focus* for definitions of words they might not understand. Ask them to read the text and see if any of their predictions about Gabriel Oak are confirmed. Elicit some brief feedback.
- 2 Ask students to read the statements and check they understand them. Students work individually to read the text again and decide if each statement is true or false. Remind them that they should correct the false sentences. Nominate different students to give the answers.

Answers

- 1 True
- 2 False. The wagon was loaded with furniture.
- 3 True
- 4 False. The woman did not get down to help the driver.
- 5 False. They argued because the gatekeeper wanted them to pay an extra two pence to pass.
- 6 True

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Students write two more sentences about the text, one true and one false, to give to a partner to answer.

- 3 Refer students to the adjectives in the table. Elicit whether each adjective is positive or negative and check they understand the meaning of each one. Point out that none of these adjectives are used in the text; instead the author shows Gabriel and Bathsheba's characters through the things that they do or say. Ask students to read the text again if necessary and decide whether each adjective describes Gabriel or Bathsheba. They write the correct name next to each adjective in the table. Ask students to check answers in pairs but don't check answers as a class yet.
- 4 Ask students to stay in the same pairs and to look back at the text and find evidence for each adjective. In less confident classes, do the first one together: *pleasant: Gabriel watched her and smiled*. Check answers for both exercises 3 and 4 as a class.

**Answers**

Adjective	Name	Sentence
pleasant	Gabriel	Gabriel Oak watched her and smiled.
stubborn	Bathsheba	But the young woman would not pay the extra money.
hard-working	Gabriel	During the week, he worked in the fields of his farm.
lazy	Bathsheba	She did not get down from the wagon to help the driver.
rude	Bathsheba	She did not thank him ...
vain	Bathsheba	She took a mirror from the package and held it up to her face. As she looked in the mirror, she smiled.
generous	Gabriel	He held out two pennies to the gatekeeper.

After reading

- 1 Refer the students to the third sentence of the text that describes Gabriel Oak as 'a man of good character'. Ask the students what *character* means in this sense (it refers to the qualities a person possesses that make them different from other people). Ask students to work in pairs to make a list of things that a person of good character might say and do. If necessary elicit one or two ideas as a class first. After around five minutes, discuss ideas as a class and make a list on the board.

Possible answers

A person of good character might: help other people; put other people first; work hard; keep out of trouble; be patient and kind; live a simple life; be honest and truthful. They might say: 'Can I help you?'; 'Are you OK?'; 'Please' and 'Thank you'.

- 2 Tell the students they are going to think a little more about the character of Bathsheba. Elicit when the novel was set (Victorian England, the 19th century). Ask them to work in pairs, read the two extracts, and discuss what more these tell us about Bathsheba. In less confident classes, first discuss as a class what they think life might have been like for women of that period (for example, women were not as independent as they are now; they weren't allowed to do many of the things men were allowed to do; many women did not have jobs, etc.). Once students have had time to discuss the extracts, discuss their ideas as a class.

Answers

The extracts tell us that Bathsheba was very independent for that time period. The first extract refers to the fact that she can ride a horse in a normal way, when at the time a woman was expected to ride side saddle, with her legs on one side of the horse, which was typical when wearing a skirt. The second extract also refers to her independence: in this case, managing her uncle's farm by herself – something that would have been very unusual at that time. These extracts suggest that Bathsheba also has some positive and admirable qualities.

- 3 Explain that students are now going to write a paragraph describing the next meeting between Bathsheba and Gabriel. Write the following headings on the board: *where? when? why? what do they say? what do they do?* Ask students to work in pairs to brainstorm some ideas for each heading, i.e. to discuss where they meet, when they meet, why they are meeting, and some things their characters might say or do. Encourage them to make notes.
- 4 When students have had plenty of time to brainstorm ideas, ask them to write their paragraph. Remind them they should describe each person's character by the things they say or do.