

Tess of the d'Urbervilles

Reading Guide & Study Questions

General Introduction

What is the significance of calling the novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* when its protagonist is in fact Tess Durbeyfield?

How does the use of a protagonist's name for the title (as opposed to a title such as *The Woodlanders* or *The Return of the Native*) shape the way the reader approaches this book?

What does the subtitle "A Pure Woman Faithfully Presented" imply? Do you feel Hardy keeps his promise? What is suggested by the division into seven books which present a sequence from "The Maiden" and "Maiden No More" to "Fulfillment"?

What does Hardy claim in his preface to the fifth edition had been his intentions in writing this novel? By his account, for what had he been criticized?

What does he find unfair about anonymous reviews? What does he think may be the value of a novel in shifting public opinion?

Phase 1 : The Maiden

1. To what does the title of the first section refer? What expectations does such a title set up for us?
2. What are some of the major themes introduced in the opening two chapters?
3. What are Tess' parents like? What are their expectations of her? What are her expectations about herself? Why does Tess feel so responsible for her family? Do you think her feeling of responsibility is excessive?
4. What are we to make of Tess's dreaminess? What does it reveal about her character? Identify some key moments in the text where Tess passively submits? What are the consequences of her passivity?
5. Chapter 1: What effect is created by the fact that the novel opens with a scene in which Tess's father encounters the parson, rather than with one which concerns Tess herself?
6. What significance does the parson find in the fact that the D'Urbervilles have declined in rank and fortune?
7. Would the Victorian reader have been expected to consider Tess's lineage significant? What theories of the day would have prompted concern with "degeneration"?
8. Chapter 2: What pleasant village May Day custom is described? What seems to be the symbolism associated with the event? Among the celebrating women, which category of women does the narrator single out as grotesque and pathetic, and thus irrelevant to the festivities? By contrast, how is Tess described?
9. With whom does Tess fail to dance at the rustic celebration? Why do you think the author includes this incident?
10. Chapter 3: What do we learn about the Durbeyfields' home situation? How many children are in the family, and where is Tess among them?
11. How does Joan Durbeyfield respond to the news that her husband's family may have had aristocratic connections? What are we to think of the reactions of John Durbeyfield and his wife to this claim?
12. Why does the narrator tell us that Tess's handsome appearance has been inherited from her mother, rather from her father's line which had included the D'Urbervilles? Are there implications to this distinction?
13. Chapter 4: What view of the news does Joan give her neighbors at the local bar?
14. What is the effect of the narrator's references to Mr. Durbeyfield as Sir John?
15. What do we learn from Joan's conversation with her husband?
16. What prompts her to imagine that her daughter will make a wealthy marriage? What reference work has she consulted to confirm her view? What self-evident facts are she ignoring in her fantasies?
17. What suspicions and advice are offered by the neighbors? Why do you think the narrator includes these?
18. Why is Tess, rather than her father or mother, forced to make a nighttime journey to the market? How could her parents have prevented the episode which follows?
19. What views does Tess express to her brother about the world in which they live? (a blighted planet) What would this seem to suggest about her character? About the novel's likely outcome?
20. What causes the death of Prince? Whom does Tess blame for this outcome? What effect on the family's livelihood will the loss of their horse bring about?
21. Chapter 5: When her mother suggests that she should go to seek favor and money from a supposed distant relative who is unaware of their existence, what does Tess say she would rather do? Would hers have been a practical suggestion? What has been Tess's ambition, and could she have obtained this under the conditions of the time?
22. Which of her mother's plans does she specifically disavow? (marriage to a wealthy distant relative) What are her father's reasons for discouraging this effort, and are his objections based on reality? What emotions prompt Tess to accede to her parent's wishes?
23. What role has Tess fulfilled toward her younger siblings? What have we learned of her character thus far?
24. In general, how are the working people and rural laborers of the novel presented? Are they stereotyped? Seen from a middle-class perspective?
25. How is the D'Urberville property described? Which features of its appearance which seem ominous?
26. What does the narrator tell us about the means by which the estate and title were gained? Are the current D'Urbervilles and the Durbeyfield family in fact related?
27. How is Alec described on his first meeting with Tess? Are the statements which he makes to her truthful? What seems to be his motives?
28. What symbolism lies in Alex's gifts of fruits and flowers? What is significant about the mode in which he offers her strawberries? Does his behavior and her response foretell aspects of their later relationship?
29. How does he respond to her request to be considered a relative? Does this indicate anything about his intentions or view of their respective social positions?
30. How does Tess respond to Alex's invitations and advances?

31. What reflections does the narrator introduce on the topic of unfortunate meetings? What does he prophecy about the future?
32. Chapter 6: Who has sent the letter offering Tess employment with the D'Urbervilles? On what grounds is she reluctant to take this offer? What pressures cause her to accede? What are the implications of the way in which her mother prepares her for the journey?
33. What observations does the narrator make about the letter which arranges for Tess's arrival at her employment? On the reasons Tess's hopes to be a teacher will not be fulfilled?
34. Chapter 7: How does Joan interpret the arrival of Alec to fetch Tess? How does the reader interpret his actions? What later compunctions does Joan have? How is the reader expected to react to these? What financial gain does John Durbeyfield hope to derive from his daughter's new connections? Could he in fact have sold his title?
35. How does Alec behave toward Tess on the journey to his home? How does she respond to his driving and to his advances? Why doesn't she simply return home at this point?
36. Chapter 9: On her arrival at the estate, what does Tess learn about Mrs. D'Urberville? Has the latter been aware of their supposed relationship?
37. What is Mrs. D'Urberville's chief interest in life, and what does she expect Tess to do?
38. How would you describe Alec's action in hiding in his mother's bedroom to observe Tess?
39. Chapter 10: On Tess's outing to the fair, how is the marketplace dance described? Does Tess wish to participate?
40. What causes Tess to be attacked by her companions on the return journey?
41. Who has followed her home, and under what conditions does she accept Alec's offer of a ride?
42. Chapter 11: What advances does Alec make during their journey, and how does Tess respond? What deceptive action places her in his power?
43. What Biblical passage does Hardy evoke in describing the scene in which Alec returns to find Tess sleeping?
44. Is Tess a victim of rape? Of confusion, sleep and strong duress? What evidence do we have for judging?
45. At the time of the novel's publication, would it have been possible for the narrator to have offered more details?
46. What suggestion of retribution is advanced by the narrator, only to be rejected?
47. What does the narrator predict will be the outcome of this night?

Phase 2 : Maiden No More

1. Some critics point to Tess' life as a succession of journeys. Identify some of these journeys and explain what she learns from them and how is she affected by her experience.
2. Tess resists Alec's advances by jumping out of the gig for her hat, which she deliberately let fly away. Tess thinks of returning home but decides to stay; at this point, Tess still feels she has choice. Is she really free at this point so that she is responsible for her decision? Does this decision to stay make her responsible for Alec's sexually violating her later?
3. The title of the second phase deals with the significance of Tess' sexual experience in her view, in society's view, and in nature. With which of these does Hardy side? Is her sexual experience the turning point in her life, as the title suggests? Though it is clearly a crucial event, what actually happened is unclear. Was she raped or seduced? Once you decide that question, another question must be decided; how responsible is she for what happened?
4. When Tess hesitates in answering Alec's request to become his mistress, is she flirting, and is her hesitation deliberately or even unconsciously encouraging? Is she inhibited by his social status, by his economic power over her and her family, or his gifts to her family?
5. Hardy's calling her sexual experiences "a liberal education," just a learning experience, shocks many readers. Is her liberal education a fortunate fall?
6. Chapter 12: When and under what circumstances does Tess return home? Why did she wait to leave her employment for some months after this nighttime encounter?
7. As Alec accompanies her part way home, on what do they disagree? What does he offer her, and why does she reject this offer?
8. Where is Alec intending to go, and from what motive? With what compliment (after his fashion) does he leave her?
9. What is the significance of Tess's encounter with the sign painter on her way home?
10. How does her family receive her? What are the implications of the narrator's calling Joan a "poor foolish" woman?
11. Had Alec wished to marry Tess? Would she have wished to marry him?
12. With what does Tess reproach her mother? How does her mother respond?
13. Chapter 13: What is Tess's mood on her return? How does she respond to music and to the changes of nature?
14. What does the (intrusive) narrator tell us about the validity of her sense of guilt? ("She had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly.") Does this commentary gloze over Alec's actions?
15. Chapter 14: How does the narrator describe the farm laborers? Among these how is Tess distinguished?
16. What is Tess's attitude toward her son? What does one of the other gleaners report about the night in which she was impregnated?
17. What narrative comment is made on Tess's character? Does this seem a quite fair description of a teen age girl who has been the object of unwanted sex when alone in a woods during nighttime?
18. What had motivated Tess to employ herself? What happens to her formerly undesired child?
19. What ceremony does she perform over him, and what is he christened? Why had he not earlier been given the benefit of this rite?
20. How does she respond to the clergyman who tells her this baptism is not valid? Does he back down? How is the child buried?
21. Chapter 15: What causes Tess to take a new job? How does she respond to the fact that the new opportunity is near where her family's ancestral lands were reputed to be?

Phase 3 : The Rally

1. How are Hardy's descriptions of Nature related to the characters in this part?
2. To what does the title of this phase refer? What signs suggest that the novel will not turn out well?
3. What sort of man is Angel? What are his strengths? his flaws? What is the significance of Izzy, Retty and Marion?
4. Chapter 16: What are some differences in the new landscape, and how do these affect Tess? What moods does the narrator ascribe to her, and with what moral implications?
5. As Tess enters her new residence, what emotions rise in her? With what form of religious rites does the narrator associate her prayer to the beauty of the land?
6. What failings does the narrator assure us she possesses
7. What turns out to be Tess's special skill, and what does this entail?
8. Chapter 17: What do we learn about the mindset and beliefs of the dairy workers?
9. How is Angel Clare first introduced in this setting, and what is his first comment?
10. What is Tess's reaction on recognizing Clare? What information does she glean about Angel and his father?
11. Chapter 18: What are the associations of Angel Clare's name? What has prompted his departure from the university? What do we learn about his alleged opinions and past life?
12. Why does he now reside on a dairy farm? What is his response to the other farm people, and theirs to him?
13. What speech of Tess attracts the interest of her fellow dairyfolk and of Clare? What aspect of her character is revealed? In this context, is the notion of separating from one's body hopeful or ominous?
14. Chapter 19: What draws Tess and Angel to each other? What views do they share about the nature of life and its difficulties?
15. On what grounds does Tess respect Angel? What oppresses her about the thought of learning history? What type of learning would she prefer?
16. Does Angel take her questions and sense of unhappiness seriously? Explain.
17. What does she learn of Angel's reputed opinion of hereditary distinctions?
18. Chapter 20: To what extent is Angel attracted to Tess by her character, and to what extent by her physical appearance? What associations does he project onto her?
19. What activities do they engage in together?
20. Chapter 21 : What story told by Mr. Crick causes Tess to feel sad? How does the story of the wronged woman whose mother intervenes differ from her own?
21. What do the other dairy girls discuss while they believe Tess lies sleeping? What are Tess's responses to Angel Clare, why does she believe he would prefer her?
22. Why does Tess have reservations about seeking his preference? Does this seem an excessive response to a past affair?
23. Chapter 22: What tasks does the appearance of a "twang" in the butter cause the dairy workers to undertake? Once again, how does Hardy use the details of dairy-making to further his account of Tess and Angel's courtship?
24. How does Tess attempt to help her fellow dairymaids in their unrequited romantic passion?
25. What form of restraint does Tess admire in Angel? What does this indicate about her expectations of men in general?
26. Chapter 23 : What Sunday morning incident prompts Angel to express his feelings for Tess?
27. Does it seem likely that one slender man could carry four women across a wide river?
28. Why do you think Hardy includes details of the effusions of Tess's fellow workers about Angel?
29. What information about Angel's parents' choice of his prospective marriage partner is rumored at the dairy farm?
30. Could the farm girls plausibly have learned of this? Why do you think this detail is included?
31. Chapter 24 : What qualities in Tess attract Angel?
32. During what dairy activity does he embrace her? What is Tess's response, and is this surprising or ominous in view of her attachment to him?
33. What does the narrator foretell will be the result of this episode? Does this remark seem to suggest a happy outcome?

Phase 4 : The Consequence

1. The meaning of the title, "The Consequence," is not as clear cut as previous titles. What is the consequence? and what is the source of the consequence?
2. What does Hardy mean when he says that Angel's fastidious love could "guard the loved one against his very self"? Is he protecting her against his baser nature? is he protecting his own idea of her? or does it mean something else altogether?
3. Tess makes two attempts to confess her past to Angel. The first time his indulgent attitude causes her to retreat and tell him about her d'Urberville ancestry. Her letter slips under the rug, so that this effort to confess also fails. Are circumstances stacked against her, or does she bear responsibility for not telling him about her past? Would her telling him before marriage have made any difference?
4. Chapter 25: According to the narrator, what changes have occurred in Angel since he has come to the dairy? How does the narrator describe the force which has affected him?
5. On Angel's visit home, what do we learn of the personality of Mr. Clare senior? What aspects of his son's experience remain foreign to him?
6. What changes do Angel's family note in him? From the narrator's perspective, have these changes been desirable?
7. How do Angel's brothers differ from their father? What advice does Felix offer Angel, and how does Angel respond?
8. How do Angel's parents use the gifts sent them from the dairy? What is indicated by Angel's reaction?
9. Chapter 26: What has his father done to compensate Angel for not having paid for his further university education?
10. Would Mercy Chant in fact be a suitable spouse for Angel?
11. What arguments does Angel use to win over his parents to the idea of his marriage to Tess? Why does he avoid mentioning his choice of partner to his brothers?
12. What incident does Angel's father describe in which Alex D'Urberville has insulted him?

13. Under what circumstances has Mr. Clare senior been attacked in the past?
14. What traits in his father does Angel admire?
15. Chapter 27: How is Tess's morning appearance described? How does she respond to Angel Clare's proposal of marriage?
16. How does Clare describe Tess's religious views to himself?
17. How does Tess react when she hears Clare's account of the man who had reviled his father at Tantridge? What details reveal to her that this man is Alec?
18. Chapter 28: How does Angel interpret Tess's rejection of his proposal? What reasons does she give for rejection? According to the narrator, why has Tess decided to decline his proposal?
19. What commonsensical response to her problem is ignored?
20. Of what does Angel accuse her? Would this have been consistent with her continued distress?
21. Even as she decides to accept Angel's proposal, what does she predict? Does her response seem inconsistent? Melodramatic? Prophetic? What view of Angel's temperament/views on sexual purity does it seem to indicate?
22. Chapter 29: What discussion held in the dairy about a neighboring marriage seems to Tess to bear on her own case?
23. Do the listeners agree on whether the bride was obligated to tell her future husband that she would lose her inheritance? What view does Tess give? Is this consistent with her future behavior?
24. What scruples does the narrator ascribe to Tess? Does the former make sense, especially in view of Alec's character?
25. What time of the day do Tess and Angel often spend together? How does their relationship gradually change?
26. Chapter 30: What understanding do the lovers come to during their ride to the railway with the milk cans? What views does Angel express about the extinction of the D'Urbervilles?
27. What troubling cues does Tess attempt to give Angel before their marriage, and on what grounds does he assume that her "history" can contain nothing of serious concern?
28. What is Angel's reaction to the news that Tess is a remote descendant of the D'Urbervilles? What plans does he reveal for her future?
29. Why does his calling her "Mistress Teresa d'Urberville" so distress her? Is his joke ominous?
30. What motivates Tess to conceal the information she had felt obligated to impart? Does this seem entirely convincing?
31. In the context of her constant anxiety, does it seem strange that Angel fails to pick up on her reference to her "offences"?
32. What is her first reaction on consenting to their marriage? (weeps) Does this seem a propitious sign for their future?
33. How does the narrator interpret her consent? In context, what does this mean?
34. Did "vague lucubrations over the social rubric" prevent Tess from telling her future husband of her lost child, or him from attending to her concern that her past history might make their marriage inadvisable?
35. Does it seem ominous that Angel repeatedly refers to her as a "child," "dear child," and so on?
36. What emotion does her memory of her first encounter with Angel awake in her? Does it seem ominous that she worries that it may have been a bad omen? Had it in fact been a bad omen?
37. Chapter 31: What dangerous advice does Joan Durbeyfield give her daughter in her second letter?
38. Does this letter release Tess from responsibility for telling her husband the truth about her past?
39. What gift do the Durbeyfields promise to send their daughter for a wedding gift? Would this have been considered tasteful?
40. How does the narrator describe the quality of Tess's love?
41. What praise of Angel does the narrator enter to offer? Is this consistent with his later destructive jealousy over his wife's brief prior relationship?
42. Does it seem ominous that he remains pleased at the thought of telling the world of her family background? Is it plausible that no one ever suspects the truth of Parson Tringham's claims?
43. What further signs of distress does she give, and he ignore?
44. What hints does the narrator give that Tess's concealment may be a feature of her sex?
45. What accidental event precipitates the news of their engagement? How do her fellow dairy women respond to the news?
46. What resolve does Tess make, and break? Why the use of words such as "seemed" or "deemed"?
47. Chapter 32: What wish does Tess state when asked to set a wedding date? What may this indicate?
48. On what grounds does the narrator claim that passivity in her situation is natural? For one thing, does she in fact associate more with nature than with her fellow humans?
49. What changes have occurred in Tess from her association with Angel, and does the narrator approve of these?
50. What plan does he hold for their immediate future before visiting his parents? Does this seem wise? Condescending? A reflection of his ambivalence?
51. On what grounds does Angel desire that they be married without bans, and why does this disconcert Tess? Does it seem propitious that he had not chosen to consult Tess about this? That he chooses her wedding clothes without consultation?
52. What old ballad ominously occurs to Tess as she tries on her new wedding clothes?
53. Chapter 33: What insult does Tess receive from a stranger in town? Do you think this incident is probable? How does Clare respond? What effect does this incident have on Tess? Again, what hints of trouble from Tess does Angel ignore?
54. What do we learn about Angel's reaction to this incident from his behavior while sleepwalking? What happens to the letter she writes him? Why does she later remove it?
55. Why is Clare not distressed by his parents' cold reaction to his wedding? Do you think they were at all justified in their dismay?
56. How does Clare respond to Tess's statement that she wants "to confess all my faults and blunders"? To her plea that it will be better to tell him before marriage?
57. What seems ominous in her mental state before the wedding? What is Tess's mindset during the service? Afterwards?
58. What ominous legend does Clare tell her about the D'Urberville coach? What seems her reaction?
59. What belief about her relationship to Alec now enters her mind? Does the narrator seem to believe this plausible?
60. What does she feel about his love for her? Compare with Hardy's poem, "The Well-Beloved".
61. What ominous noise occurs as the couple leave on their journey?

62. Chapter 34: What motivates Clare's choice of a honeymoon residence? As a consequence, what aspects of the house does Tess find alarming?
63. Does it seem likely that her features will be recognizable in portraits of women from two centuries earlier, especially as the faces portrayed are suggestive of treachery and arrogance?
64. How does Clare respond to the realization that her happiness is in his hands? Does he know himself?
65. What is the effect of the gift/loan of jewels from his parents? Does it make sense that parents who would not attend the ceremony cannot wait until meeting the bride to send jewels from Clare's godmother?
66. Is the accompanying letter from his parents cordial?
67. Does it seem ominous that he finds the jewels gleam "somewhat ironically" on his wife? On what grounds does he decide they are suitable?
68. When the servant, Jonathan, brings their possessions, what story does he relate? How does the story affect Tess?
69. What confession does Clare then make, and what is Tess's response?
70. What ominous imagery accompanies Tess's recital of her past with Alec? Does it seem strange that "her story of her acquaintance with Alec d'Urberville and its results" does not include mention of the child's fate?

Phase 5 : The Woman Pays

1. Why is Angel unable to forgive her when she just bestowed the gift of forgiveness on him? Is her sexual experience the cause or his character and misconceptions? Does her confession necessitate their separation, or do they part because of particular traits each has? Could Tess have averted the parting by behaving differently and thereby changed her destiny? Or is her destiny unchangeable? Is she victim, self-victimizer, or both?
2. Is she a victim of circumstance, of inevitable fate, of Angel's character, of her own character, of her heredity, or some combination of these factors?
3. The course of Tess's life parallels the seasons. The novel opens in late May, a hopeful time when life renews. She arrives at the d'Urberville home in late spring; her parents hoped for financial support from the wealthy d'Urbervilles, and Tess hopes to earn enough to replace their horse. A few years later, she has a renewal or rally in the spring. Her courtship with Angel takes place over the summer, a time of ripening and fulfillment in nature and of love and happiness in her life. She spends the winter, a time of death in nature, at Flintcomb-Ash. If Tess's life follows a natural cycle, does this mean that the course of her life is predetermined or fated?
4. Is arbitrary coincidence at work in her stopping at just the time and just the place where Alec is speaking? Is it coincidence that she stands in the sun so that he notices her movement when she leaves? Is their meeting again inevitable because life follows a pattern or occurs in cycles? Or is it inevitable because her personal past with Alec cannot be escaped in society?
5. Chapter 35: How does Angel react to Tess's account? Does she manage an argument? What renunciation does she make? What promise does she make, and does he accept it?
6. Of what does he accuse her, and would these charges apply to him? How does he relate her actions to her background? Does this speak to the case? What condemnation does he make of her background? Does this seem consistent with his earlier views?
7. What does she volunteer to do? How does he react? What likely reaction would a modern reader have?
8. What response does the embittered Clare have to the portraits of the D'Urberville women?
9. Chapter 36: What concrete information does he finally seek? What interpretation of their respective status does Clare now give? Had he formerly sought these traits?
10. What is Tess's response, and does she narrator seem to think this natural?
11. What solutions does she suggest in an attempt to aid him? Would divorce in fact have been possible? What reason does she give for not having considered suicide? What does she consider would be a suitable way for her life to end?
12. What grounds does the narrator give for Angel's rejection of appeals which would "almost have won round any man"?
13. What grounds does he give for his entire refusal to trust? What principle can he refer to?
14. What excuse does the narrator offer?
15. Would a moralistic Victorian have expected a man to refuse to live with his wife on the grounds that she had had an affair some years previously?
16. What does Angel decide is Tess's relationship to Alec? Does consent or intention not matter? How does he think her past will affect others? Do you think this likely?
17. On what grounds does Tess agree with him? In what terms does the narrator gloss this thought?
18. What are some disturbing elements to this scene? Granted that marriage and family patterns have changed in the past 120 years, are there troubling elements of this scene?
19. What does she resolve to do, and where will she go? On what grounds does the narrator consider that Angel is motivated by "the will to subdue the grosser to the subtler emotion, the substance to the conception, the flesh to the spirit")?
20. Under what conditions, in this narrator's view, could a romance or marriage be engaged in without shame, guilt, ambivalence or unhappiness?
21. Chapter 37: What eruption of Clare's subconscious gives his wife a brief hope of reconciliation? What is her response when he seems likely to drown her? To where does he take her, and why does she attempt to guide him home?
22. Does this scene seem plausible? Why does his wife not tell him of this scene?
23. When the couple stop at the dairy to bid goodbye before leaving, does anyone notice a change in their demeanor?
24. What commands and charges does Angel give Tess as he leaves her?
25. Does the narrator think she might have behaved other than meekly? How does the narrator gloss her "Pride"?
26. Would it be just to describe her as "reckless" at this stage? Does the narrator provide alternatives? Is her behavior plausibly related to that of her ancestors?
27. Chapter 38: What reception does Joan give her daughter, and how does she interpret the failure of the daughter's marriage? How does Tess's father react?

28. What financial provision for her parents does Tess make in order to shield Angel?
29. Chapter 39: What does Clare believe has been his punishment for not having abandoned Tess on the grounds of her noble ancestry?
30. What plans has Clare made, and with what motives? Would there have been alternatives for achieving these aims?
31. What prompts Clare's visit home, and what conversations does his appearance without his wife elicit? Has his mother accepted the idea of his marriage?
32. What seems his mother's preoccupation, and how does this gall him? Does he speak truthfully in response?
33. What response does his father make? Would the Biblical description of a hard-working, provident wife have applied to Tess?
34. Have his parents accepted the class differences which had formerly grieved them?
35. Does the narrator's evaluation of this old couple seem consistent with their words and actions?
36. Why is purity such a preoccupation when their very gospel is based on forgiveness (as we see later in the case of Alec)? [Would not unbelief have seemed more important to these fundamentalists than a past but repented lapse, the more so as they would have known of many such cases?]
37. Whom does Angel blame for his lies to his parents? What defense of Tess does the narrator give?
38. Chapter 40: Do you think that under other circumstances Tess and Angel might have been happy? Or were there deep psychological problems which might have surfaced even had she not been the victim of abuse? Or did that abuse contribute to the problems?
39. What topics does Angel debate with Mercy Chant? What does he do with the jewels given to Tess? How much money does he leave for her, and does this seem likely to provide enough support?
40. What motivates him not to give his parents her address? What later problems might this cause?
41. Whom does he meet on returning to the farmhouse? What news does she bring of her fellow dairywoman Marian?
42. What do you make of his proposition to Izzy? On what grounds does he justify it? Is this an accurate or plausible account of the source of his problems?
43. Does he promise to love his future partner? Of what does he warn her?
44. What is Izzy's response? What account of Tess changes Angel's mind?
45. Why does Angel refuse to rejoin his wife at this juncture? How does this square with his recent proposition to another woman?
46. What vision of the future does he cherish? Does this seem consistent with a knowledge of the world and its perils? Of the effect her single state will have on others?
47. Chapter 41: What events not of her making gradually reduce Tess to poverty? Where does she seek occupation and why? What has changed in her manner?
48. What undesired attention causes her anxiety? How does she respond?
49. What creatures join her in her woodland retreat, and why? What views does she (and presumably Hardy) hold on hunters, and how does she relieve the pain of their victims? What lesson does she take from this encounter?
50. Chapter 42: From what motives does Tess attempt to diminish her physical attractiveness? Do the measures she takes seem extreme?
51. What are the conditions of her new employment at Flintcomb-Ash?
52. What response does Marian have to Tess's degraded condition?
53. When Tess informs her parents of her new address, what does she conceal and why?
54. Chapter 43: How does the narrator describe Tess's characteristic patience? Does it seem fair to describe Tess as physically timid?
55. Of what do Tess and Marian converse as they work?
56. What weather conditions are described, and how does this change the work conditions of the women? What discomfort is caused Tess by the attitude of her employer?
57. On what grounds does Tess hope Angel will relent? How does she explain to others his leaving her in poverty?
58. What unpleasant account of Angel's behavior causes Tess pain? Does she blame him? What does this revelation prompt her to do?
59. What does she do to fortify her courage in the act?
60. Chapter 44: With what purpose in mind does Tess leave the farm and travel to the Vicarage of Angel's parents?
61. What are some difficulties of the trip? Why does she not wait for the Vicar to return to the parsonage after church?
62. What other events turn her from her purpose?
63. What does the narrator consider "the greatest misfortune of her life"? On what grounds?
64. What ill result comes of her removing her veil in the sunshine before passing by a barn inside of which a preacher is delivering a sermon?
65. Who is the speaker, and what incident does he relate? What is Tess's response?

Phase 6 : The Convert

1. To whom does the title of this section apply? How? What is the effect of Tess on the conversion of these converts?
2. When Tess falls again to Alec, does she have a choice, or is she overwhelmed by the hopelessness of her family's circumstances, her sense of responsibility for the children, and her loss of faith in Angel's return? Are other traits, like a tendency to self-sacrifice, operating? Has she ever had a choice? Are there times when she does have a choice and her decisions and actions are the result of her character? In answering these questions, consider the ways Tess is economically, socially, and sexually vulnerable, even powerless; how coincidence and historical movements determine events; and the role which her personal past and family past play in her life.
3. A well-traveled, open-minded stranger persuades Angel that he judged Tess too harshly and that his concept of purity was too rigid. How convincing is Angel's change, which is summarized in a page or so? Are other influences than the stranger working to change Angel?
4. Chapter 45: What changes have occurred in Alec since she had last seen him? What effect does her passing by have on him?
5. What does Alec claim is his motive in later overtaking Tess on her journey? How does she respond to his account of his past and conversion?

6. What strange request does he make, and what does this indicate? What is her response? Why does Tess continue to talk with him? Does this seem consistent with her stated aversion?
7. What change does Alec note in her speech? What past event does she tell him of?
8. What demand does Alec make of Tess on parting? What does she later learn the stone marker on which she had sworn had commemorated?
9. Chapter 46: When Alec visits her during her work hours, what purpose does he claim to have?
10. How does he respond to the information that her husband has left her? What lesser assailant interrupts their conversation?
11. What happens when he visits her home? After seeing his approach, why does she answer her door?
12. What do they discuss? Does it seem plausible that her repetition of Angel's words should work Alec's deconversion? Does she grasp all that she is saying?
13. On what grounds does she wish Alex to leave her?
14. What irony does Alec find in the fact that the words of Tess's husband have affected his faith?
15. Chapter 47: In what terms is the steam-driven threshing machine described? What labor is Tess formed to perform?
16. What comment does her fellow worker Izzy make on Tess's loyalty?
17. What is the reader supposed to make of Alec's repeated appearances? On this occasion, what news does he give Tess?
18. What is Alec's response to the idea that one might maintain an ethical system without theological belief?
19. How does the narrator explain the fact that Tess's reasonings on moral matters are limited?
20. How does Tess respond to Alec's propositioning? Of what does she accuse him?
21. At this point, is it plausible that he continues to follow her? With what threat does he leave?
22. Chapter 48: As the final phase of the hard labor of harvest continues, what new temptation does Alec offer? Does she accept?
23. What is the tone of the letter she writes Angel? Why had the two previous letters not been finished and sent?
24. Chapter 49: With what does Mrs. Clare reproach her husband? What do they hope for Angel's marriage?
25. How has Angel fared in Brazil? How have his thoughts regarding his wife begun to change? Whose opinion in the matter influences him?
26. What does the narrator think Angel's classical studies have inclined him to believe? On what grounds, then, does he admit that he has deserted Tess?
27. What does the narrator believe has been Angel's problem? Does this seem plausible? Why would "general principles" cause him to desert his wife and only notions of the "particular instance" prompt reconciliation?
28. What does the narrator believe has prompted his harshness?
29. According to the narrator, then, are Angel's responses entirely socially conditioned? If so, why do all the others who are aware of the separation find it strange or needless?
30. What prompts his rekindled ardor?
31. How does Tess prepare for the possibility of Angel's arrival?
32. What sudden news and messenger aborts Tess's unpleasant sojourn at Flintcomb-Ash?
33. Chapter 50: Why doesn't Tess wait until morning to begin her journey home?
34. What thoughts occur to Tess as she passes a forest en route home?
35. At home, what conditions does she find, and how does she respond?
36. Who follows Tess as she gardens? Does his behavior seem odd? What does he offer?
37. What drastic effect proceeds from Mr. Durbeyfield's death? Has the reader been prepared for this outcome?
38. Chapter 51: What changes have undermined the stability of their rural village?
39. What had been some of the lapses of the Durbeyfield family in the eyes of their neighbors?
40. How has Tess's return home affected their situation? Does this seem likely?
41. On Alec's next, inopportune visit, what does Tess learn of the legend of the D'Urberville coach?
42. What does Alec offer her on this occasion? On what grounds does she refuse? Does she seem to temporize?
43. What new letter does she write Angel?
44. What do the children sing as a farewell to their home, and how does this sadden Tess?
45. What does she resolve to be toward her brothers and sisters?
46. What final reflections on Alec darken the end of the chapter?
47. Does the rest of the novel bear this out?
48. Chapter 52: As the family move, whom do they encounter on the road? Why do you think this meeting is included?
49. What are Marian and Izzy prompted to do, and what delays the execution of their kind intervention?
50. What bad news do the Durbeyfields receive on their arrival at Kingsbere? Whose negligence has brought about this result?
51. To what new indignity is Tess's family subjected, and under what ironic circumstances? How is this scene symbolic?
52. What wish does Tess express in her unhappiness? What has prompted her desperation?

Phase 7 : Fulfillment

1. How is the title of this section bitter and ironic?
2. How does Stonehenge figure in Tess' end? What do you think it represents?
3. Is there a suggestion that another cycle is about to begin with Angel and Liza-Lu? Because she is "a spiritualized image of Tess", would such a relationship seem more likely to succeed than his relationship with Tess?
4. Is it Tess's misfortune to be pursued and loved by Alec and by Angel? Between them, do they unintentionally doom her? Is she their victim?
5. Does her past make her death inevitable?
6. Chapter 53: What changes in Clare are noted on his return home?

7. On what grounds does his mother urge him not to concern himself about his wife? Does this seem consistent with her prior emotions?
8. What causes Angel to delay in rejoining Tess? What does Mrs. Durbeyfield write in answer to his inquiry? How does he interpret her letter?
9. Does Angel seem perceptive in interpreting the possible pressures which have prompted his wife's desperate letters?
10. What new information does he learn from his parents? How do his parents respond to the news of Tess's past?
11. What warning is contained in the missive he receives from the farm women?
12. Chapter 54 : What does Clare learn on his first and only visit to Tess's former home at Marlott? What act in honor of the Durbeyfields does he perform as he leaves?
13. What does he learn of Tess from her mother? On what matter do they differ?
14. Chapter 55: How does Angel interpret the news that Tess is now Mrs. D'Urberville? Does this seem obtuse in view of her former reluctance to claim the name?
15. What painful news is Tess forced to impart? What ominous impression of Tess does Angel take away from their interview?
16. Chapter 56: From whose perspective is the murder of Alec described? How is this effective in enhancing the sense of horror?
17. What does the snooping landlady hear as she walks by Tess and Alex's apartment?
18. Chapter 57 : How does Tess find Angel, and what is his reaction to her story? What does she give as her reasons for her deed?
19. How does Angel interpret her mental state? Is he correct? With what does he associate "her aberration"?
20. With what intention does he guide them away from habitations? Where do they hide, and how do they manage to subsist?
21. Chapter 58: What event from the past does Tess describe to Angel, and how does he respond?
22. What causes their delay in moving from this shelter? What emotions prompt her reluctance to attempt escape? What finally prompts them to leave? Are they correct to be frightened?
23. As they travel northward, what set of structures do they encounter? What ominous associations surround Tess's choice of resting place? What emotions does she feel as she rests?
24. What last wish does she leave him with, and on what grounds?
25. How does he answer her question regarding whether they will meet again?
26. Under what circumstances is she arrested, and what causes the policeman to delay in seizing her?
27. What does she say when she understands her situation?
28. Chapter 59: From what perspective is Tess's death recounted? Why do you think we do not learn anything of her trial and imprisonment?
29. How are Lisa-Lu and Angel described? What are some grim aspects of this scene?
30. Do you feel that the marriage of Lisa-Lu and Angel will bring closure to the novel's basic themes?
31. Is Hardy's ending intended to be calming (that is, good comes from evil) or a bitter commentary on injustice? (if so, sympathetic treatment of the mourners unlikely)
32. The issue of shame and family dishonor due to sexual impropriety is a major theme of the book; what do you think of the fact that murder, hanging and the attendant notoriety associated with a crime is scarcely treated by comparison?
33. What do you think of the ending? How else might Hardy have concluded his novel? Would a happy outcome have been consistent with the previous overtones of the plot?

General Questions

1. How does the friendship/association between the four (and later three) women at the dairy and afterwards add to the portrayal of Tess, and to the plot in general?
2. How are Tess's class origins reflected in linguistic registers? Are differences in speech and education important to the novel's themes?
3. Do you think the novel's characterization of Angel is entirely consistent? Of Tess? Of other characters? Do these inconsistencies detract from the novel or add to its power (or both)?
4. In what ways are the narrator's evaluations – of Tess and her background, of the causes of her problems, of Angel Clare and of religious hypocrisy – intended to shape our view of events?
5. Is this story of a dairywoman told from a middle-class viewpoint? Which aspects of lower-class rural culture does the narrator find worth recording? (folk superstitions, myths, folk legends and stories)
6. What are some of the novel's most significant symbolic scenes, and are these related in some way? (D'Urberville jewels in firelight and the dripping blood of the murder scene; use of D'Urberville graves and Stonehenge scene; lurid account of Tess's exhausting farm labor on the mechanized reaper at night)
7. What are some of the novel's best features? (lovely landscape descriptions; unusual blend of descriptions of manual labor with romantic themes; use of irony; concern with folk customs, often portrayed ironically; erotically suffused descriptions; pointed and elevated phraseology; blend of lush settings and portrayal of poignant and tragic cross-purposes; striking symbolic scenes; complicated portrayals of tangled human emotions)
8. This late Hardy novel once again explores the life of an unconventional heroine. On the title page of the first edition, Hardy calls Tess "A Pure Woman," and yet many of his contemporaries found his portrayal of Tess objectionable. How did Hardy mean us to understand Tess's "purity"?
9. A simplistic reading of the novel would hold that Alec is the villain, Angel the hero. But generations of readers have pointed out Alec's complex relationship to Tess, as well as Angel's inherent weaknesses. What point is Hardy trying to make by having both of Tess's lovers be so much less than perfect?
10. The descriptions of Dorset in this novel are rich, especially the descriptions of agricultural lands and practices. How do the depictions here compare to the depictions in Hardy's earlier novels?
11. Why include Stonehenge?

12. In the closing paragraphs of the novel, Hardy writes: "'Justice' was done, and the President of the Immortals (in the Aeschylean phrase) had ended his sport with Tess." This passage suggests a particular religious conception as governing the novel's action, but are we to take it seriously? What is the religious view of this novel? Is there hope for the supernatural redemption of suffering? Or has Hardy seemingly abandoned such a theology?
13. Is *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* a tragedy, and is Tess a tragic figure? The answer to these questions may depend on the way you define tragedy. Or you may apply Hardy's concept of tragedy to the novel and decide whether it fits his definition. Over the years, he made a number of references to tragedy.
 - "A Plot, or Tragedy, should arise from the gradual closing in of a situation that comes of ordinary human passions, prejudices, and ambitions, by reason of the characters taking no trouble to ward off the disastrous events produced by the said passions, prejudices, and ambitions" (1878).
 - "Tragedy: It may be put thus in brief: a tragedy exhibits a state of things in the life of an individual which unavoidably causes some natural aim or desire of his to end in a catastrophe when carried out" (1885).
 - "The best tragedy—highest tragedy in short—is that of the WORTHY encompassed by the INEVITABLE. The tragedies of immoral and worthless people are not of the best" (1892).
14. Do you agree with Hardy's definition(s) of tragedy? Is he really describing tragedy?
15. Hardy's novel makes frequent use of animal imagery. How is this imagery used? What effect does this imagery have on your experience of the novel?
16. Hardy added the subtitle, *A Pure Woman*, at the last moment. It has created problems for readers and critics ever since the novel's appearance. The title offends many on moral grounds, for whom Tess is a "ruined," immoral woman. Others are puzzled intellectually; what is Hardy's basis for calling her pure?
17. The novel is organized around seemingly natural cycles. Her movement through the phases of one of these cycles is indicated by the headings for each of the seven phases. What is the effect of calling portions of our lives "phases"? To what discourse does such a term belong and how might this mixing of discourses affect our reading of the novel?
18. For most readers, the major issue in this novel is whether Tess is victimized, whether she is responsible for her fate, or whether she is partially victimized and partially responsible for her fate. What do you think about these questions?