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Sample

Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



**The Mayor of
Casterbridge**

by Thomas Hardy

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms

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Objectives

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

1. identify the ways in which the novel's original publication in serialized format guided Hardy's method of telling the story.
2. discuss the role of coincidence in the novel.
3. present evidence from the text that Hardy both understood the need for industrialization and mourned the passing of simpler, traditional ways.
4. write paragraphs comparing and contrasting Henchard with Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane with Lucetta.
5. discuss what makes Henchard, as the novel's subtitle puts it, "a man of character."
6. discuss the ways in which Henchard's character remains consistent throughout the course of the novel.
7. define symbolism, allusion, simile, foil, theme, irony, dialect, and foreshadowing and provide examples of each from the novel.
8. discuss Henchard as a tragic hero and identify his tragic flaw.
9. define the vocabulary words listed in the study guide.
10. discuss the benefits and drawbacks, as put forth in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, of living a life controlled by passion versus the benefits and drawbacks of living a life controlled by reason.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. The subtitle of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is *The Story of a Man of Character*. In what ways is Henchard a “man of character”? What are some of his most admirable qualities?
2. Discuss Hardy’s choice of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* as a title. Technically, the title could refer to either Henchard or Farfrae. Do you think Hardy intended it to have a double meaning?
3. After a drunken Henchard sells his wife at a fair, he gives up alcohol completely—yet, decades later, entirely sober, he continues to make choices that cause himself and others hurt and shame. If alcohol is not his downfall, what is? Support your opinion.
4. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* was originally published in serial form in a magazine. What aspects of both the plot and the points at which the chapters break might lead a reader to suspect that the book was published in that manner?
5. Discuss the role of coincidence in the novel. Does the high occurrence of coincidences detract from the story’s believability? Does your opinion of the book change if you see coincidences as the workings of fate instead?
6. What are some modern-day equivalents of the skimmity-ride? How are celebrities’ lives made objects of public ridicule?
7. What function do the members of working-class Casterbridge (such as Longways and Mother Cuxsom) play in the novel?
8. Discuss the significance of weather to the citizens of Casterbridge and its impact on multiple events in the novel.
9. Henchard is portrayed as a man ruled by his passions and Farfrae as a man ruled by reason. Discuss the benefits and drawbacks of each man’s approach to life. Which character do you think Hardy prefers?
10. When Henchard wakes up after the auction, his first concern is whether or not he told the onlookers his name. His efforts to retain and his dismay at losing his “good name” come up frequently throughout the novel; in addition, he tries to get Elizabeth-Jane to take his name. Why is his “good name” so important to Henchard?
11. In the novel, Casterbridge is slowly moving toward industrialization. What opinions do you think Hardy held about the introduction of new technology? Industrialization was happening at roughly the same time as the writing of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.
12. When you have read Henchard’s will, do you feel sympathy for him or feel like he has gotten what he deserves? What do you think Hardy intended his readers to feel?

The Mayor of Casterbridge

Chapters 1-3

VOCABULARY

abjure – firmly reject
alacrity – eager readiness
desultory – without purpose
ephemeral – short-lived
fustian – cotton and linen weave
imprudent – not well-thought-out
intrepid – having great endurance (here, a strong tolerance for alcohol)
levity – lightheartedness
nimbus – rain cloud
ochreous – yellowish
penuriousness – oppressive stinginess
phlegmatically – dully or apathetically
superciliousness – haughtiness
taciturnity – disinclination to talk

1. What, according to the text, is especially peculiar about the way Michael and Susan walk into Weydon-Priors?

2. What is Michael in search of in Weydon-Priors?

3. The sight of what makes the spectators in the furmity tent realize that Michael's offer is not a joke?

4. What does Henchard confess to being poor at, and imagine Farfrae will excel at?

5. What most impresses the crowd at the Three Mariners about Farfrae's singing?

6. What sort of relationship does the town of Casterbridge have with the countryside around it?

7. What two things has Susan learned about the matured Henchard that give her the courage to send him a note through Elizabeth-Jane?

Chapters 25-27

VOCABULARY

calumniated – had one's reputation unfairly smeared

lucubrations – nightly studies

Protean – diverse, versatile

refluent – backwards-flowing

1. Why do you think Henchard hires Jopp, of all possible people?

2. What larger conflict is symbolized by the clash between the two wagons?

3. Why does Lucetta agree to marry Henchard?
