



Exploring Senior Cycle Texts

The Mayor of Casterbridge by Thomas Hardy

The Mayor of Casterbridge by Thomas Hardy is a novel included as part of the Prescribed Material for the Leaving Certificate English Examination in 2026 & 2027. It may be used as a single text at Ordinary Level or part of the Comparative at Ordinary Level or Higher Level.

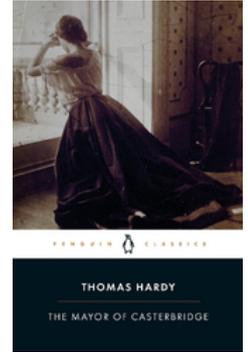


Image courtesy of Penguin Books



Scan the QR code or [click here to access a Getting Started with Guide for this Text](#)

Please note:

- The following tasks might be completed over a series of lessons.
- You may like to adapt and adjust the tasks to suit your context.
- *The Mayor of Casterbridge* covers themes which could be considered sensitive or controversial. You may wish to consult with our READY Framework to support you in your study.

Before you read (Teacher Guidance)

1. Vocabulary exploration

Instruct pupils to research the meaning of the following words from the extract. *Furmity, deterrent, cursory, perverse, slily, serenity, jovial, conduct, prattle, imprudent, trusser, well-nigh, shilling, broodmare.*

2. Moral dilemma

Present this question to the class: *Should one terrible mistake define a person's entire life?*
Ask students to discuss in pairs or small groups, then share their thoughts.

3. Predict the Plot

Give students this short summary prompt: A man makes a terrible mistake at a fair that changes his life forever. Ask them to write a brief prediction of what might happen.

Extract

Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) tells of Michael Henchard, a farm worker who drunkenly sells his wife and child, later reforms and becomes mayor, but ultimately dies lonely and ruined after their return.

The young man and woman ordered a basin each of the mixture, steaming hot, and sat down to consume it at leisure. This was very well so far, for furmity was nourishing, and as proper a food as could be obtained within the four seas ; though, to those not accustomed to it, the grains of wheat swollen as large as lemon-pips, which floated on its surface, might have a deterrent effect at first. But there was more in that tent than met the cursory glance; and the man, with the instinct of a perverse character, scented it quickly. He watched the furmity seller from the corner of his eye, and saw the game she played.



Activities Based on Extract (Teacher Guidance)

The following may be completed in written or oral format,
as individuals or as part of a group activity.

1. Exploring Characterisation

Guide students in developing a “character snapshot” of Michael Henchard using evidence from the extract. You may wish to prompt attention to first impressions, motivations, and personality traits. Students may use this exploration to compose a short evaluative response considering the extent to which sympathy for Henchard is established at this point in the narrative.

2. Considering Responsibility and Perspective

Facilitate discussion or debate around the question of whether Henchard should be held fully responsible for the events of the scene. Students may work collaboratively to prepare and present differing viewpoints supported by textual evidence.

You may wish to extend this exploration through a short creative response written from Susan’s perspective, reflecting on the events and emotional impact of the moment.

3. Analysing Language and Tension

Support students in examining Hardy’s language choices that contribute to mood and tension. Encourage attention to descriptive contrast, symbolism, and dialogue before inviting students to produce a brief analytical response exploring how tension is created in the scene.

Reflect and Respond (Teacher Guidance)

The following question may be based on the extract included or form part of your extended study of the novel.

1. Reflecting on Theme

Invite students to explore themes such as regret and redemption through a reflective essay examining how individuals attempt to reconcile past mistakes.

2. Developing Argument

Facilitate argumentative writing using the prompt “Drunkenness excuses nothing.” Students may respond in the form of a speech or article, drawing on both the text and wider perspectives when considering responsibility and behaviour.

3. Exploring Social Change

Guide students in considering the position of women in Hardy’s society and encourage discursive reflection on the extent to which gender roles have evolved in contemporary society.

4. Reimagining Events

You may wish to support creative responses that reinterpret the fair scene, such as composing a newspaper report describing the “wife sale” from a journalist’s perspective, including public reaction and eyewitness viewpoints.

5. Creative Extension

Encourage students to compose a short story beginning with a shocking public declaration, inviting connections with themes of consequence and social judgement present in the novel.