

Discussion Questions: *Far from the Madding Crowd*

1. *Webster's Dictionary* defines madding as "the crowded world of human activity and strife." Are the events portrayed in the novel far from the world of human activity and strife? Is the title of the novel ironic?
2. The title of the novel is taken from Thomas Gray's poem "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard." The line used for the title of the novel reads: "Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife/Their sober wishes never learned to stray; /Along the cool sequestered vale of life/They kept the noiseless tenor of their way." Were the inhabitants of Casterbridge isolated from strife, jealousy, passion, betrayal, etc. that occur in a big city? Why did Hardy choose this particular poem for the title of his book?
3. Who, if anyone, is the hero/heroine of the novel?
4. Were the names chosen for the characters representative of their natures?
5. Early in the novel, Gabriel Oak identifies Bathsheba's character flaw as vanity. Does this prove true throughout the course of the novel?
6. Does it seem likely that a woman, like Bathsheba, who declares her disdain for marriage in the early parts of the novel would fall madly in love with a character such as Frank Troy? Why or why not?
7. In chapter eight, a number of the men are talking at the malthouse, and the malter tells the crowd about Bathsheba's father. He relates that Bathsheba's father was a fickle husband. Does this fickleness extend to Bathsheba as well?
8. The novel begins and ends with Gabriel Oak and Bathsheba. Does the beginning give clues to the end of the novel?
9. Boldwood woos Bathsheba throughout the novel, but she displays no romantic interest in him. The final sentence in the Twenty-Fourth chapter reads: "It was a fatal omission of Boldwood's that he had never told her she was beautiful." Does this imply that the way to Bathsheba's heart was through flattery?
10. Frank Troy is portrayed as being faithless as well as a man of low character. Why does Bathsheba initially ignore these character traits, while everyone else sees them? Why does she not heed Gabriel's warnings about Troy? Why do Gabriel and Boldwood not tell Bathsheba about Troy's involvement with Fanny?