

READING ACTIVITY

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FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD

Read the excerpt from Chapter One of *FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD*, and then do the exercises below.

When Farmer Oak smiled, the corners of his mouth spread till they were nearly at his ears, and the lines around his eyes looked like a picture of the rising sun. Gabriel Oak was twenty-eight, tall and broad-shouldered, but he had a humble way of walking and standing, as if he didn't want to frighten anyone.

One morning Gabriel was watching over his sheep on a hill when he saw a bright yellow wagon on the road below. It was pulled by two horses and loaded with household goods and furniture. There was a young, attractive girl sitting at the top of this pile, next to a pot full of red flowers, and a yellow bird in a cage. The wagon stopped and the driver walked back along the road, looking for something that had fallen. The girl was alone.

Gabriel watched her. The girl sat quietly for a moment, then she picked up a mirror from the pile of objects beside her. She looked at herself and smiled. The sunlight touched her red jacket, her bright face and dark hair. The driver came back and the wagon started to move again. Gabriel followed it.

There was a gate in the road with a toll charge—anyone who used this road had to pay two pence. The wagon stopped and the driver started arguing with the gatekeeper; the girl was refusing to pay. Gabriel stepped forward and paid the two pence for her. 'here' he said to the gatekeeper. 'Let the young lady pass.'

The girl glanced down at Gabriel. She told the driver to move on.

'A pretty girl,' said the gatekeeper, watching the wagon as it rolled away.

'But she has her faults,' Gabriel answered. 'Vanity, for one.'

He saw the girl again several times—she was staying with her aunt on a nearby farm, and so they were practically neighbours. He thought about her more and more.

It was late December, and freezing cold. Out in the countryside you could see the different colours of the stars, some yellow, some white, some almost red. Gabriel spent his nights in a shepherd's hut in the fields. There were wheels under the hut's floor and he could move it to different parts of his farm. He had to be close to the sheep now that the lambs were being born. The hut was very small, but it had a good stove for warmth—though he had to keep the vents in the walls open or smoke could fill the place. (Many shepherds had died falling asleep with the vents closed in huts like this.) At night everything was quiet, except for the sounds of the bells around the sheep's checks, so sometimes Gabriel would sit by the stove and play his flute.

One night he was in his chair, almost asleep. 'I have to open the vents,' he said to himself. 'But I'll wait until the hut gets a bit warmer...'

He woke up. His dog was barking and someone was pulling him outside. His face and neck were wet. He looked up and found that he was lying with his head in the lap of the dark-haired girl.

'What's the matter?' Gabriel said in a sleepy voice.

'Nothing, now. Since you are not dead,' said the girl.



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EXERCISES

1 Choose the correct answer – a, b, or c.

1. Gabriel Oak had a humble way of walking and standing

- a. because his legs were injured.
- b. because he didn't want to frighten anyone.
- c. because he was very poor.

2. A bright yellow wagon pulled by two horses

- a. carried sheep.
- b. carried pots full of red flowers.
- c. carried a young girl, household goods and furniture.

3. The toll charge at the gate in the road was

- a. two pence.
- b. twenty pence.
- c. twenty-two pence.

4. The girl on the wagon

- a. was friendly and smiled at Gabriel.
- b. was going to stay with her aunt.
- c. was going to work on a farm.

5. In order to sleep safely in the shepherds' hut

- a. Gabriel had to open the vents.
- b. Gabriel had to turn on the stove.
- c. Gabriel had to leave the door open.

6. Gabriel Oak fell asleep inside the hut

- a. and woke up when he heard the bells of the sheep.
- b. and nearly died.
- c. but woke up suddenly because he was very cold.



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2 Are the following sentences true (T) or false (F)?

1. Gabriel Oak was thirty-eight years old. T F
2. The girl on the wagon was wearing a red jacket. T F
3. The gatekeeper and the wagon driver argued about the toll charge. T F
4. Gabriel told the gatekeeper that the girl was vain. T F
5. Gabriel spoke to the girl and said, 'I know your aunt on the nearby farm.' T F
6. Gabriel liked playing the flute when he was inside the hut. T F
7. The wagon driver pulled Gabriel out of the hut and saved his life. T F

