



READING 2C Relate the characters, setting, and theme of a literary work to the historical, social, and economic ideas of its time.

3 Evaluate the changes in sound, form, figurative language, graphics, and dramatic structure in poetry across literary time periods.

RC-12(B) Make complex inferences about text and use textual evidence to support understanding.

DID YOU KNOW?

Thomas Hardy ...

- initially wanted to be an architect, not a writer.
- based his novel *A Pair of Blue Eyes* on his experiences courting his wife.
- published 14 novels, 3 volumes of short stories, and over 1,000 poems.

(background)

Hardy's home at Max Gate

The Darkling Thrush Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?

Poetry by Thomas Hardy

Meet the Author

Thomas Hardy 1840–1928

In the final years of Thomas Hardy's life, dozens of younger British writers made a pilgrimage to visit him at Max Gate, his home outside Dorchester, in southwest England. Virginia Woolf, Robert Graves, E. M. Forster—these and many other writers were paying homage to the novelist and poet whom British author D. H. Lawrence called “our last great writer.”

Humble Roots Max Gate was not far from the humble cottage where Hardy grew up. The son of a stonemason, he was educated in Dorchester and later served as an apprentice to a local architect. In 1862, he left for London, where he worked for several years for an architecture firm that specialized in the building of churches. It was during these years that Hardy began writing poetry and fiction in his spare time; his first novel was published in 1871.

Fame for Wessex Success came three years later with *Far from the Madding Crowd*, the first of Hardy's novels to detail the landscape and people of “Wessex,” his name for his native southwestern England. The novel's positive reception justified Hardy's

decision to give up architecture entirely and devote his life to writing. Soon he had produced a string of successful novels, including *The Return of the Native* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

Controversy and Change In 1891, Hardy's novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* provoked a storm of controversy because of its sympathetic treatment of what many viewed as immoral behavior. His next novel, *Jude the Obscure*, was also met with hostility. One critic called it *Jude the Obscene*, and it was banned by bookstores and libraries. Disgusted, Hardy abandoned the novel form and concentrated on his poetry. Gathering poems he had been writing since the 1860s, he revised and published them as *Wessex Poems*. He followed with more poetry collections, as well as *The Dynasts*, a verse drama.

Back to Wessex Like his fiction, Hardy's poems often delve into the ironies of life and explore the indifference of nature and society. Though his poetry, too, had its critics, Hardy was by now recognized as a lion of British literature. When he died, his ashes were interred in Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey. His heart, however—removed at his request before cremation—was buried in his native “Wessex.”

Author Online

Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HML12-1068



LITERARY ANALYSIS: TONE

Thomas Hardy is an author known for his **tone**, or attitude expressed toward his subject. In his work, he often focuses on the bitter ironies of life, causing his contemporaries to accuse him of being overly pessimistic—a charge Hardy hotly denied.

Sometimes you can detect a distinct tone in a poem's very first stanza. At other times, however, you must carefully read the whole poem to discern the poet's attitude. As you read "The Darkling Thrush" and "Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?" consider Hardy's word choice and use of imagery. Think, too, about the mood created by each poem's setting. Exploring these elements will help you detect and analyze Hardy's tone.

READING SKILL: DRAW CONCLUSIONS ABOUT SOCIAL CONTEXT

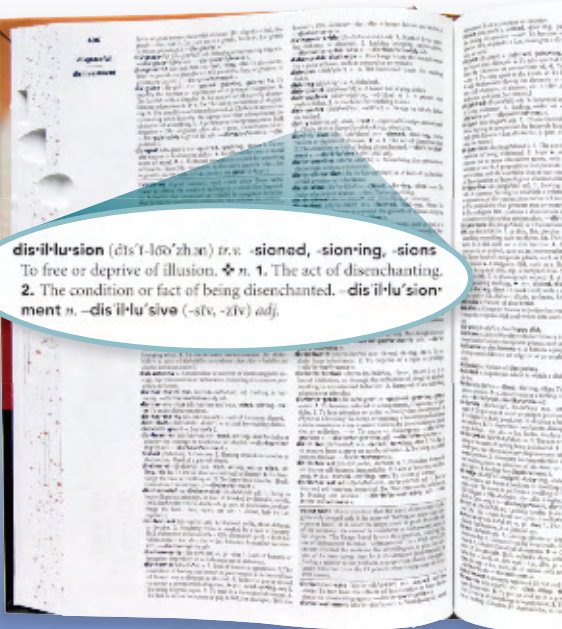
The **social context** of a work refers to the social conditions that inspired or influenced its creation. Though some of his peers criticized Hardy's pessimistic outlook toward life, this outlook was becoming increasingly common as the Victorian era gave way to the 20th century. A time of transition, the late Victorian era was marked by an exodus to the city as millions of people deserted rural farms. Many social critics, Hardy among them, feared this mass move would mean the loss of old customs, traditions, and values. Also taking hold in this turbulent era was a strong feeling that both nature and society were indifferent to the suffering of the individual. As you read, use a chart to record lines from each poem that you think reveal something about the era in which they were written. After you read, you'll use your notes to **draw conclusions**—or make sound judgments based on evidence and experience—about the conditions to which Hardy is responding in these poems.

"The Darkling Thrush"	
Text Clues	Notes on Social Context
"The ancient pulse of germ and birth / Was shrunken hard and dry," ("The Darkling Thrush," lines 13–14)	These lines refer to the seeds of spring, usually a symbol of hope and rebirth, but here the speaker describes them as hard and lifeless. This might reflect the pessimism or unease about the future common in this era.

Would you rather keep your ILLUSIONS?

Thomas Hardy once remarked, "If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst." Do you agree that it is essential for people to face the truth, no matter how difficult, or is disillusionment just too painful?

DISCUSS With a group of classmates, discuss the definition of *disillusion*. Do you think that people must be free of their illusions in order to fully live? Are there some illusions you would rather hang on to, or is facing painful truths an important part of life? Describe the situations or examples—real or fictional—that influenced your answers.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

THE Darkling Thrush

Thomas Hardy

BACKGROUND This poem was first published in *Graphic* magazine a few days before the end of the 19th century. Its original title was “The Darkling Thrush: By the Century’s Deathbed.” The word *darkling* means “in the dark.”

I leant upon a coppice gate
 When Frost was specter-gray,
And Winter’s dregs made desolate
 The weakening eye of day.

5 The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
 Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh
 Had sought their household fires.

The land’s sharp features seemed to be
10 The Century’s corpse outleant,
His crypt the cloudy canopy,
 The wind his death-lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
 Was shrunken hard and dry,
15 And every spirit upon earth
 Seem’d fervorless as I. **A**

At once a voice arose among
 The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
20 Of joy illimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
 In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
 Upon the growing gloom.

25 So little cause for carollings
 Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
 Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
30 His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
 And I was unaware. **B**

1 coppice (kŏp’ĭs) **gate**: a gate leading to a coppice, a small wood or thicket.

2 specter-gray: ghost-gray.

5 bine-stems scored: twining stems cut across.

6 lyres: harplike musical instruments.

7 nigh: near.

10 outleant: outstretched.

13 germ: seed; bud.

A TONE

Consider the poem’s **setting**, as well as Hardy’s **personification** of the 19th century in line 10. Citing specific words and phrases, explain what tone is established by these literary elements.

19 evensong: evening song.

20 illimited: unlimited.

22 blast-beruffled plume: wind-ruffled feathers.

B SOCIAL CONTEXT

Reread lines 25–28. Why does the speaker see “so little cause for carollings”? What aspect of late Victorian thought does this attitude seem to echo?



M. BRIGH
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Ah, ARE YOU DIGGING ON MY GRAVE? Thomas Hardy

“Ah, are you digging on my grave,
My loved one?—planting rue?”
—“No: yesterday he went to wed
One of the brightest wealth has bred.
5 ‘It cannot hurt her now,’ he said,
‘That I should not be true.’ ”

2 rue: an herb associated with sorrow and regret because its name is identical to the word *rue*, meaning “sorrow and regret.”

“Then who is digging on my grave?
My nearest dearest kin?”
—“Ah, no: they sit and think, ‘What use!
10 What good will planting flowers produce?
No tendance of her mound can loose
Her spirit from Death’s gin.’ ”

11 tendance: attendance; watchful care.

12 gin: a snare or trap.

“But someone digs upon my grave?
My enemy?—prodding sly?”
15 —“Nay: when she heard you had passed the Gate
That shuts on all flesh soon or late,
She thought you no more worth her hate,
And cares not where you lie.” **C**

C TONE

So far, how does Hardy’s tone in this poem compare with the tone he takes in “The Darkling Thrush”? Explain, citing specific lines that influenced your answer.

“Then, who is digging on my grave?
20 Say—since I have not guessed!”
—“O it is I, my mistress dear,
Your little dog, who still lives near,
And much I hope my movements here
Have not disturbed your rest?”



Fox Terrier (1800s), Arthur Wardle. Oil on canvas. Private collection. © Bridgeman Art Library.

25 “Ah yes! *You* dig upon my grave . . .
 Why flashed it not on me
 That one true heart was left behind!
 What feeling do we ever find
 To equal among human kind
 30 A dog’s fidelity!”

 “Mistress, I dug upon your grave
 To bury a bone, in case
 I should be hungry near this spot
 When passing on my daily trot.
 35 I am sorry, but I quite forgot
 It was your resting place.” **D**

D CONTEXT

Do you see any connection between the way the woman’s loved ones respond to her death and the late Victorian outlook described on page 1069? Explain what social conditions Hardy might be responding to in this poem.

Comprehension

1. **Summarize** What is the **setting** of “The Darkling Thrush”?
2. **Recall** Whose voice does the speaker of this poem hear, and how does he describe the sound?
3. **Clarify** Who are the two speakers conducting a dialogue in “Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?”

Literary Analysis

4. **Interpret Symbol** In “The Darkling Thrush,” is the thrush’s song hopeful or hopeless? Explain what you think the thrush symbolizes, making sure to address each of the following:
 - when and where the speaker sees the thrush
 - the thrush’s appearance and what he has “chosen” to do
 - how the speaker feels about the thrush’s song
5. **Identify Irony** Situational irony occurs when a character expects one thing to happen but something else happens instead. Re-examine “Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?” What reactions to her death does the woman seem to expect? What is ironic about the revelation she receives? Cite evidence to support your answers.
6. **Analyze Satire** Satire is a literary technique in which ideas, customs, or behaviors are ridiculed in order to make a point or improve society. What is Hardy satirizing in “Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?” Explain your answer.
7. **Compare Tone** How are these two poems similar or different in tone? In which poem does Hardy express a harsher or more biting attitude? Explain, citing examples from both poems to support your answers.
8. **Draw Conclusions About Social Context** Consider the social context that shaped Hardy’s work. How does each of these poems reflect the sense of pessimism and disillusionment permeating the late Victorian era? How does each convey the anxiety about the indifference of nature and society? Cite the evidence you recorded from both poems to support your conclusions.



READING 2C Relate the characters, setting, and theme of a literary work to the historical, social, and economic ideas of its time. **3** Evaluate the changes in sound, form, figurative language, graphics, and dramatic structure in poetry across literary time periods. **RC-12(B)** Make complex inferences about text and use textual evidence to support understanding.

Literary Criticism

9. **Author’s Style** Though Hardy’s poems reflect the concerns of his time, he is known for his eloquence in expressing **universal themes** as well. Identify the themes expressed in these works. In what way are they universal? Explain, citing evidence.

Would you rather keep your **ILLUSIONS?**

Would you describe Hardy as a realist or an idealist? Cite lines from the poems to defend your position.

Changing Times, Changing Views

The Victorian age was a dynamic one, full of change, promise, and upheaval. Depending on one's perspective, the fast-paced change was either exciting or terrifying. Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" poignantly expresses sadness and alienation in response to the times; for this reason, it is viewed by many as the quintessential poem of the 19th century.

"'Dover Beach' displays at its best Arnold's gift for expressing the feelings of the transitional times—the indecision, the confusion, the regret."

—Miriam Allott, *The Victorian Experience: The Poets*

"'Dover Beach,' perhaps Matthew Arnold's best-known poem, . . . is the fullest expression of its author's religious doubt and a classic text of Victorian anxiety in the face of lost faith."

—Lance St. John Butler, "Dover Beach"

"'Dover Beach' has been called the first modern poem. If this is true, it is modern not so much in diction and technique . . . but in psychological orientation. Behind the troubled man standing at the lover's conventional moon-filled window looking on the sea, we sense . . . the shift in the human viewpoint from the Christian tradition to the impersonal world of Darwin and the 19th-century scientists."

—James Dickey, "Arnold: Dover Beach"



Extension Online

INQUIRY & RESEARCH Like the Victorians, we live in an age of rapid change, hotly debated for its benefits and its costs. Choose one contemporary technological, intellectual, or cultural change and conduct online research about its advantages and disadvantages. Consult credible reference sites, news sources, and other informational sites for both facts and opinions on the topic. Share your findings with your classmates.

Writing to Synthesize

Matthew Arnold was not the only writer reflecting upon the turbulent changes of the day. In their respective essays "Evidence of Progress" and "The Condition of England," Thomas Macaulay and Thomas Carlyle wrote decisively about the virtues and evils of the age. Choose one of the two authors and write an essay in which you explain how he might have responded to Arnold's poem "Dover Beach." Do you think the essayist would have agreed that the poem expresses the essence of the Victorian age?

Consider

- what you know about the Victorian age as a whole
- the world view expressed by the essayist
- the world view suggested in "Dover Beach"



WRITING 15C Write an interpretation of an expository or a literary text.