

**19th Century Novel
Social and Economic Class Assignment**

Due dates: This assignment is due January 28. If you turn in the assignment early enough, I will mark it up with comments and corrections as if it were a timed writing. If you turn in the assignment early, there will be a small grade incentive (+3 points). If you miss the midnight deadline but turn in the assignment before eight hours have elapsed, there will be a small point deduction (-3 points). If you turn in the assignment between eight and twenty-four hours late there will be a larger point deduction (-10 points). If you turn in the assignment at any point after that, there will be a substantial point deduction (-20 points; this is a flat deduction, not a cumulative one based on the number of days late). If you turn in the assignment late, but do not want points deducted, you may earn back credit by completing BOTH prompts. It will be counted in the gradebook as a half a major grade.

The Writing Task

Choose ONE of the following prompts. Answers should have the following characteristics:

- 1) citation from AT LEAST TWO external sources (I gave you two sources, the chapters from *Daily Life in Victorian England* and *The Victorian Frame of Mind*-- there are other, more specific choices on my web-site, arranged by topic) and your novel choice (though the non-fiction citation will likely be paraphrase, not quotation);**
- 2) parenthetical references and a Works Cited page (you cannot make above an 80 without them);**
- 3) multiple paragraphs;**
- 4) obvious understanding of the novel as a whole (and not a narrow focus on the first couple of pages); and**
- 5) a length of over 600 words (though you should not expect a superior grade if your goal is to make the minimum word count).**

If you feel the need to gather any more sources, see the following web-site for the format to use for any extended Works Cited: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

Novels, like any other art form, arise from a social environment from which they were formed. Whether they affirm or are critical of society, however, differs by degree. Read the selections from *Daily Life in Victorian England* and *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (which give an overview of the issues involved) and explain to what degree your novel choice is either supportive or critical of at least one aspect of the social and economic structures that were the foundations of 19th century English society. Do not merely summarize the plot.

Novelist Pauline Hopkins once wrote about how, "Our surroundings influence our lives and characters as much as fate, destiny or any supernatural agency," and there is perhaps no greater influence on character than the social environment that forms its root. Read the selections from *Daily Life in Victorian England* and *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (which give an overview of the issues involved) and explain how the social and economic structures that formed the foundations of 19th century English society affect the psychological or moral traits of a character in your novel choice. Do not merely summarize the plot.

A word of caution: all three novels are deeply concerned with issues involving economic and social status, and it is incredibly easy to take evidence out of context to produce what I like to call a “cartoon version of the text,” where you oversimplify an important issue into black and white terms. Specifically, do not write about how money and high social status is evil and lack of money and lower social status is good. This is a gross over-simplification of all four works, as even a cursory examination of the books reveal. While it’s true that money and high social status complicates relationships and has at least the *potential* to corrupt characters (to one degree or another), none of the books is arguing that poverty is virtuous and wealth is something that is best avoided.

Strongly consider downloading from my web-site the sources for the outlooks for each individual author concerning these issues. This will help avoid the over-simplification trap.

Help with the Writing Task

Even if you’re normally too lazy to look at my models, I would strongly suggest looking at this one. It is under the

The other, more general advice I would give is to come up with your argument first-- one where an examination of social and economic class would help to prove your argument.

In terms of timeframes, the bulk of the action in *Jane Eyre* takes place between November 1799 and 1809. *Great Expectations* starts in approximately 1810, and the main plot-line ends in approximately 1826. *Emma* takes place between the autumn of 1813 and the autumn of 1814. *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* begins in May of 1884 and ends in July of 1889. This should help you to understand what information does and does not apply to you in the secondary sources.

Emma is from the point of view of the upper class (the landed gentry) and the upper middle class. *Jane Eyre*’s background is middle class, but she is impoverished by virtue of being an orphan. Mr. Rochester is obviously from the upper class (the landed gentry). In *Great Expectations*, although Joe is working class, blacksmithing is a skilled trade, generating enough income to be at the high end of his economic class. When Pip moves to London, he experiences life through the eyes of the upper middle class. Of the important characters in *Great Expectations*, only Bentley Drummle is from the upper classes; even Miss Havisham has an upper middle class background. *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* is largely from the point of view of the working class, with Angel and Alec being from the upper middle class. The old d’Urberville family is actually aristocratic, but this is obviously no longer the case.

In terms of the outlooks of the authors, Austen is least critical some features of the 19th century class structure compared. In real life Austen was a political conservative (though not a dogmatic one), but she had no problem poking fun at wealth and privilege (especially when it leads to snobbery or excess). She was also open to the idea of some fluidity between economic and (to a lesser extent) social classes. Brontë and Dickens both wrote very much from a middle class perspective. Both were concerned with the plight of the poor (especially Dickens), but both were much more interested in exploring the possibilities of social advancement for people like them. Of the four authors, Hardy is the most concerned with the lives of the working classes, though he is very critical of some aspects of

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working class culture and outlook. All four authors were solidly middle class themselves, as was their readership. None of the authors argued for jettisoning the class structure altogether or establishing a more equitable distribution of wealth. **More information on the views of all four authors on social and economic class can also be downloaded from my web-site.** I would look at these-- their views were more complicated than my overview indicates.

Be attentive to the distinction between social and economic class, as one can come from a privileged background (and retain many social advantages), while being cash poor (a new reality for mid-18th and 19th century England). One can also be cash rich, but lack the polish and social prestige of the old upper classes of the formerly feudal economy; in 19th century novels, such characters tend to be depicted as vulgar and rapacious (I'm thinking particularly of Miss Havisham from *Great Expectations* and Alec d'Urberville from *Tess*). The final thing to notice is that "new money" is often more overtly snobbish than "old money," since upper middle class and non-titled upper class social climbers often strove for the social prestige of the old aristocratic classes.

As a kind of overview of the economic class system, the traditional upper classes consisted of the nobility and large landholders who were entitled to be called "gentlemen" (the landed gentry). These were the leisure classes who do not have to work for a living. In the mid-18th and 19th century, the upper middle class emerged as a significant category, and some of this class actually ended up accumulating more money than the traditional upper classes. Other members of the upper middle class included the degreed professions, bankers, and wealthy clergymen. The lower middle class would still have had some education and included professions like merchants, shopkeepers, clerks, and teachers (including governesses). The working class (by far the largest group) would have been largely uneducated and worked in careers that involved manual labor. Finally, you have the poor, some of whom had no regular employment and some whom only worked sporadically or seasonally.

Parenthetical References

" _____ " or paraphrase (author last name page number) .

↑
If you are using just one source, you do not need this part (as long as it is clear who said it).

↑
If you establish the author in the introduction to the quote/ paraphrase (even with multiple sources), you also do not need this part.

↑
end punctuation:
period, comma,
question mark, etc.

I cannot emphasize this enough: the vast majority of the time you should be summarizing the historical texts with paraphrase, not looking for quotes. Save the quotes for the novel (which should be the focus of any kind of close reading). The historical background is just that-- a *background* that makes your argument about the novel comprehensible.

The highest possible grade you can make is an 80 without proper citation.

Works Cited

- 1) Add your novel.
- 2) Add your minimum of two additional sources. I've included the two from the packet here if this is all you use. The citations for the other sources appear at the tops of each one of them.
- 3) The italicized title is part of the citation. Underline if you are writing this by hand. If you are copy and pasting a citation, do not forget to fix the formatting for this part.
- 4) After the first line of text in a citation, each additional line is indented.
- 5) Alphabetize the citations.
- 6) Skip lines between citations.
- 7) The citations should be aligned along the left margin, not center aligned.
- 8) Do not use bullet points.
- 9) You will lose points if you don't have a Works Cited.

Austen, Jane. *Emma*. 1815. Vintage, 2007.

Brontë, Charlotte, *Jane Eyre (with Connections)*. 1847. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 2009.

Dickens, Charles. *Great Expectations*. 1860. Bantam, 1986.

Hardy, Thomas. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. 1892. Bantam, 2004.

Houghton, Walter E. *The Victorian Frame of Mind*. Yale University Press, 1957.

Mitchell, Sally. *Daily Life in Victorian England, Second Edition*. Greenwood, 2009.