ON SCREEN

STARRING
Nastassja Kinski, Peter Firth, Leigh Lawson and John Bett

Tess

Directed by Roman Polanski (1979)

DVD

Winner of three Academy Awards, Roman Polanski's *Tess* was praised for Polanski's **convincing and faithful portrayal of Hardy's novel** on screen. His choice of Nastassja Kinski as Tess, who was only 16 years old at the time and virtually unknown in the film industry, was a contributing factor to the film's success as she gave the role an innocence and sensitivity which mirrored almost exactly Hardy's heroine.

The story on screen so far...

The film extract we are going to watch is the moment which **describes the cruel twist of fate in the story** which will affect the rest of Tess's life. Tess is now working at the dairy and she and Angel have fallen in love. He desperately wants to marry her but she feels the need to unburden her conscience first by revealing her past to him: the fact that she was Alec d'Urberville's mistress and had had a child to him. In the scene you are going to watch Tess has just made her first, weak attempt to tell her story but Angel interrupts, saying 'None of that matters, Tess'. She then decides to write him a letter before the wedding.

Over to you

1 Watch the scene the first time concentrating on the visual aspects and answer the following questions.

1. Where are Angel and Tess at the beginning of the scene?
   ☐ sitting in a carriage ☐ sitting in a train
   ☐ walking down the road
2. What time of day is it? How do you know?
3. Where is Tess when she writes the letter?
   ☐ in her study ☐ in a sitting room
   ☐ in her shared accommodation
4. What are the other people in the room doing?
5. How does director Roman Polanski help the viewer to understand the following?
   ☐ it was difficult for Tess to write this letter
   ☐ she took a very long time to write it
   (Look for clues in the scene.)

2 Now watch the scene again and listen closely to the dialogue, underlining the correct word to complete Tess's letter.

'My youth, my *eccentricity/simplicity* (1) and the strangeness of my *situation/life* (2) may perhaps lessen[1] my fault[2] but since I *committed it/fulfilled it* (3) I am guilty[3]. I must be *weary/guilty* (4) because the Lord saw fit[4] to take my *child/baby* (5). If what I have just written failed to pass my *mouth/lips* (6) in your presence when I had repeated it a thousand times in my *heart/mind* (7) it was for fear of *punishing/losing* (8) you forever. For love of you I shall conquer[5] that *feeling/fear* (9) and bring you this *letter/note* (10). Once you receive it, Angel, you will *hold/keep* (11) the rest of my life in your hands. I *need/hope* (12), I tremble[6], I love you.'

1. **lessen:** ridurre.
2. **fault:** colpa.
3. **guilty:** colpevole.
4. **saw fit:** gli sembrava giusto.
5. **conquer:** conquistare.
6. **tremble:** tremo.

3 In the letter why is Tess convinced that she must be guilty of her past actions?

4 Why is Tess so frightened to tell Angel the truth about her past?

5 What power does Tess say Angel will have over her when he reads the letter?

6 Does Angel read the letter? If you don't remember, re-read the plot summary (see page 51).

7 When does Angel discover the truth? Again, go back to the plot summary.