



Madame Bovary

Gustave Flaubert



About the author

Gustave Flaubert, the son of a doctor, was born in the French port of Rouen in 1821. Although it may have seemed likely that he too would become a doctor, he chose the law profession but had to give it up due to illness. From early childhood he wanted to become a writer, and now was his chance. He spent five years writing *Madame Bovary*, which was first published in parts in 1857. The French government did not approve of the immorality in the story and Flaubert was nearly sent to prison. He hated the social attitudes of the middle classes in France and his writings revealed too many truths about them. In fact, *Madame Bovary* is based on real people and real events. Almost everything he published after that he had written earlier, but he constantly revised what he wrote. Flaubert travelled to the Middle East in 1849, and to Africa in 1858, but he spent most of his life in the small village of Croisset, near Rouen, with his mother and a young niece. Flaubert's sister had died, leaving the young girl to be brought up by her grandmother. Flaubert never married, although he did have at least one affair. During his lifetime he was not much admired by critics. His writings, however, had the greatest influence on literature later, and not only in France. He died suddenly in 1880, leaving an unfinished novel *Bouvard and Pécuchet*. His early writings from his childhood and youth were published after his death in three volumes.

Summary

Emma Bovary lives in a romantic dream world, filled with mental images taken from youthful reading of romantic novels, which is more real to her than life. Tortured by these ideals, Emma grows more and more dissatisfied with her husband and their way of life. She is married to

an ordinary doctor who is an unimaginative middle-class man who never guesses about the secret dreams that fill Emma's mind. But her longings for a glamorous, romantic life will destroy them both, since she will have many lovers and debts trying to make her dream world come true. In the pain and indignity of dying, which were beyond her imagination, she is finally forced to face reality.

Chapter 1: Madame and Monsieur Bovary are a middle-class couple, who struggle hard in life. They are very different. He started many businesses but failed and he prefers resting and spending time by himself to working and sharing with his wife. She is an excellent housewife and a hard worker and, since she feels very lonely, she devotes all her time to her son, Charles, who by the age of twenty makes his mother's dreams come true: he has become a doctor and married a widow with a good income.

Chapter 2: After Monsieur Rouault breaks his leg, Charles spends a lot of time at his farm trying to help him recover and comforting his young daughter, Emma, whom he soon falls for. This makes Charles's wife very angry but she has a harder time when the Bovarys find out that she has lied to them as she is practically broke. She soon falls ill and dies.

Chapter 3: Now a widower, Charles feels sad and lonely and spends most of his time working. Monsieur Rouault visits him and invites him to spend some time at his farm. He soon realises that Emma and Charles have fallen in love and tells Charles that he agrees to their getting married. The wedding takes place the following year and everybody enjoys the party.

Chapter 4: The newly-wedded couple moves to Charles's home in Tostes and he soon starts practising medicine and working all day long. He feels happier than ever before but he ignores his wife's feelings of loneliness and disappointment. Emma has found out that the exciting life in all the novels she has read is much better than her boring reality. But her fantasy dream-world comes true for a short while when the Bovarys are invited to the Marquis d'Andervilliers's luxurious dance at his chateau and Emma even gets to dance with a wealthy Viscount, an unforgettable moment in her dull life.

Chapter 5: Emma feels terribly sad and bored back home. She does her best to improve her looks, her home and their standard of living, secretly looking forward to receiving another invitation from the Marquis so that she



Madame Bovary

could see the Viscount again. But neither her husband nor her life live up to her expectations and she falls seriously ill and depressed. Charles decides that they should move to another town, Yonville, so as to cheer her up, especially now that she is pregnant.

Chapter 6: When the Bovarys arrive in Yonville, they stop at the local inn, owned by Madame Lefrancois, for dinner, where they meet many people who welcome them. While Charles speaks to Monsieur Homais, the local pharmacist, Emma spends the whole evening speaking enthusiastically to Léon Dupuis, a local clerk, and they are amazed to find how much they have in common and that they share the same tastes and interests.

Chapter 7: Charles has a hard time trying to find enough patients to make ends meet in Yonville. He can only find happiness thinking of his unborn child. Emma wants to have a boy since she thinks the life of girls is more difficult and limited. Yet her expectations are crushed when she gives birth to a baby girl, Berthe. Emma is so weak that the baby is sent to a wet nurse's home and Emma regularly visits her accompanied by Léon. Léon is by now aware of how he feels about Emma and is of two minds about whether to let her know.

Chapter 8: When Emma realises that she is head over heels in love with Léon, she changes her attitude towards him. She avoids spending time with him or even talking with him, but deep down, she is in terrible pain, is angry and feels empty. Léon is also depressed and he decides to leave Yonville to work abroad. He visits her to bid farewell and they are both broken-hearted.

Chapter 9: After Léon leaves, Emma is devastated and tries to comfort herself with little luxuries. She soon meets Monsieur Rodolphe Boulanger, who immediately falls for her and does his best to spend as much time with her as possible. They spend time together during the Yonville Agricultural Show and he declares his love for her. To his surprise, she appears not to reject him.

Chapter 10: Rodolphe visits Emma and asks her to go riding with him but she turns him down, since she thinks people may find it odd. Unaware of what is going on between Emma and Rodolphe, Charles convinces his wife to go riding, believing it would be good for her health. That afternoon Emma and Rodolphe begin a love affair. Emma starts buying lots of gifts that she cannot afford for her lover and ends up owing a lot of money to the local

draper, Monsieur Lheureux. Emma makes plans to run away with Rodolphe.

Chapter 11: Rodolphe cruelly abandons Emma, and the shock of his attitude towards her makes Emma depressed and ill for months. Charles takes good care of her and is so worried that he spends a great deal of money on medicines and starts having lots of debts. His situation worsens as Monsieur Lheureux begins to claim all the money the Bovarys owe him.

Chapter 12: As Emma recovers from her condition, Charles takes her to the opera to cheer her up and they run into Monsieur Léon, who has just come back from abroad. Emma and Léon meet the next day and he confesses to her that he loves her. Soon after, Emma begins an affair with him.

Chapter 13: Emma's father-in-law passes away. Monsieur Lheureux takes advantage of the situation to visit the Bovarys and to convince Emma that she should manage the financial and legal affairs of the couple and negotiate privately with him. Consequently, Emma becomes extremely dependent on her creditor. In the meantime, Emma makes the most of every opportunity to spend time in Rouen with her lover.

Chapter 14: While Emma is in Rouen with Léon, she runs into Monsieur Lheureux, who pretends not to see her but a few days later he visits her. He persuades her to sign a series of documents that would pay for her debts and allow her to have more money for all her expenses. With more money in her pocket, Emma starts making more demands on Léon. This threatens his career and he begins to lose interest in her. They gradually drift apart.

Chapter 15: By now Emma has gone deeply into debt without her husband's knowledge. The bailiff comes to her home to make a list of goods to be sold, and all the neighbours find out about her debts. She asks Léon, and even Rodolphe, for money but they both turn their backs on her. She sees that paying her debts will be impossible and that her deceits will be uncovered. In a final dramatic gesture, she takes poison and writes a letter to Charles telling him everything.

Chapter 16: After Emma's death, Charles organises her funeral. Soon after, everybody tries to profit from his loss and several people start claiming the money the Bovarys owed them. Looking for objects to sell, Charles discovers the love letters from her two lovers, and when he runs into



Madame Bovary

one of them, Rodolphe, he goes for a drink with him and says, 'I'm not angry with you. Fate is to blame!' Broken-hearted, Charles passes away and little Berthe, who is left by herself, is sent to live with an old aunt and has to work in a cotton mill.

Background and themes

The Romantic Period in art and literature began in the eighteenth century as a turning away from earlier forms and ideals. Sensitivity and sensation were important to this new way of seeing the world and of expressing human life and feelings. As always in new developments and ways of thinking, people pushed towards unknown and previously unthinkable areas. The French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars changed established life in Europe. A crisis point was reached in the revolutionary year of 1848. Amid this social and political disturbance, romantic ideas spread rapidly. Flaubert, a highly sensitive and imaginative child, read a large amount of romantic literature, which was to have a great influence on his early writing. He was filled with determination to write a successful novel when he began work on *Madame Bovary*. Instead of a romantic heroine, Emma Bovary became an 'anti-heroine'. Flaubert saw her reading of romantic novels and their influence upon her as poisonous and dangerous. He wrote about her passion and sexual relationships outside her marriage to a respectable doctor. Some critics saw Flaubert as a writer in the new 'realist' school of literature, which was just beginning.

Some of the main themes in the book are gender and class issues.

The powerlessness of women: throughout the story, it is seen how all the men around Emma wield the power to improve or worsen Emma's life and how she lacks power to make decisions of her own.

The failures of the middle class: Emma's frustration and depression have to do with her disappointment and dissatisfaction with the reality of the French middle-class.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- Discuss:** Have students discuss the following.
 - Get students to look at the cover of the Reader and answer these questions: *How old is the woman? What is she like? What do you think she does everyday? What does she like? Why?*

- Divide the class into two groups. Tell Group One to write down what hobbies, activities, duties etc., they imagine women in the late eighteenth century generally did. Group Two should write what women were not supposed to do in those days. Ask students to read their lists out loud and write the points on the board.

Introduction

- Discuss:** Tell your students that they will read a book about Emma Bovary, a Romantic woman, and to answer the same questions in (a) and the tasks in (b) after reading the Introduction.
- Predict:** *Madame Bovary* has been made into many films. Divide the class into those who have/haven't seen it. Have each group retell or predict what the story is about using these words:

blush	breeze	cider	convent	dizzy
franc	(doctor's)	practice	stocking	
textile	shiver	sigh	weep	

Tell students to look up the words they do not know in the Word List in back of the Reader.

- Tie in with films: What are they saying?** If you have access to video or DVD, watch the first three to five scenes of any of the film versions of *Madame Bovary* with the sound off. Have students choose one of the scenes and imagine what the characters say. Play the film again and check whose guess was closest to the original.

Chapters 1–3

While reading

- Write:** Get students to write Madame Bovary's personal diary. Tell them the following: In Chapter 1, we find that the first Madame Bovary's life is so dull that her son becomes the centre of her world. Write out her secret thoughts and feelings for her husband and son in her personal diary.
- Pair work and role play:** Have students choose between the two situations from Chapter 2 below and dramatise them.
 - Imagine you are Charles and Emma. Write what they said in their first dinner together on page 5.*
 - Imagine you are Charles and his wife, Heloise. Write out what they both say when she becomes jealous of his visits to Les Bertaux.*
- Pair work:** Students read the first pages in Chapter 3 and draw a chart comparing Charles's life in Chapters 2 and 3: his wives, his life, his feelings, his activities, etc.

After reading

- Pair work:** Ask students to work in pairs and discuss Charles Bovary's life. *How do you think Charles Bovary's early life affected him as an adult? Write down your ideas and talk about them.*



Madame Bovary

- 9 **Discuss:** Ask students to work in small groups and discuss and make a list of French customs in the Romantic Period. Guide them with these questions: *What have you learnt about French social customs in the Romantic Period in these chapters? What about the role of men and women?*
- 10 **Predict:** Ask students to write five questions they would like to know about how the story continues. Make sure each question is about a different character.

Chapters 4–6

While reading

- 11 **Research:** Social class difference in France in the early nineteenth century.
- Put students into groups. Ask them to re-read pages 18–21 and discuss what they know about class differences in France during the Romantic period.
 - Students decide what they would like to learn about class inequality in France in the early nineteenth century. They can use the library or the Internet to find out.
 - Ask the groups to report back to the class.
- 12 **Group work:** Put students in groups and ask them to do the following:
Imagine that you are the owners of Chateau La Vaubyessard. Write down your ideas for the dance. How many guests will there be? What music will be played? What will the guests eat? What will you wear? What entertainment will you provide?
- 13 **Write and group work:** Get students to retell part of the story, changing the point of view. Give them these instructions:
In Chapter 6, the narrator tells us how Emma and Charles feel and what they do in their first evening in Yonville. Imagine you are one of the men from Yonville e.g., the pharmacist or Léon. Tell his view of the story. How did he feel about the newcomers? How does he think the Bovarys will do in Yonville?

After reading

- 14 **Discuss:** Ask students to discuss the following questions:
How different are Emma and Charles? Think of their aims in life, their dreams, their desires, their realities, their plans, etc. Discuss why you think they are so different.
- 15 **Guess:** Have students play this game:
Choose one of the characters in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Then walk around the class and describe yourselves and what you do. The others must guess who you are.
- 16 **Pair work and role play:** Ask students to work in pairs. One is Emma Bovary and the other is a dear friend of hers.
Emma meets her best friend. They talk about Emma's marriage, her life in Tostes and what she hopes for the future. The friend asks her questions and gives Emma advice.

Chapters 7–9

While reading

- 17 **Pair work and role play:** Get students to plan and dramatise this conversation.
Imagine you are Emma and Charles in Chapter 7. Emma has just given birth to Berthe.
Student A: You are Emma. You are very tired and depressed. Tell your husband how you feel.
Student B: You are Charles. You are worried about your wife. Do your best to cheer her up.
- 18 Get students to see Chapter 8 through Léon's eyes. Give them the following instructions:
Imagine you are Léon. Write in your diary what has happened since you met Emma: what you told her and what you did not dare say, how you feel about Charles, what you dream of, etc. Write your feelings about all this.
- 19 **Pair work and discuss:** Put students into pairs. Ask them to re-read Rodolphe's arguments in Chapter 9 on page 50 and discuss the following.
How does he try to persuade Emma to do what he wants? Are his ideas good and his methods effective? What type of personality has he got?

After reading

- 20 **Discuss:** Ask students to work in groups and to discuss the following.
Why does Emma want to have a son and not a daughter? Do women still feel like this in your country? Why/why not?
- 21 **Pair work and role play:** Put students into pairs. Ask them to practise, then role play, the conversation between Madame Bovary and Rodolphe while they are sitting in the empty council meeting room in the Town Hall.
- 22 **Predict and group work:** Ask students to do this activity.
Now that you have done research about social customs in France and discussed the role of men and women in the early nineteenth century, predict what Emma will do form now on and how society will react to that.

Chapters 10–12

While reading

- 23 **Pair work and role play:** Get students to plan and dramatise this conversation as they read Chapter 10:
Student A: You are Charles. You are worried about the health of your wife. Tell Rodolphe how worried you are about her and how grateful you are for his offer.
Student B: You are Rodolphe. Convince Charles that you want to help the Bovarys, that you are a friend of the family and that riding will be very good for Emma's health.
- 24 **Discuss:** Ask students to read the first three pages in Chapter 11 and to discuss how the goodbye letter that Emma receives from Rodolphe affects her personal life and her family life as well.



Madame Bovary

- 25 Get students to imagine they are Emma at the theatre in Chapter 12. Ask these questions:
As you read the first pages in Chapter 12, imagine you are Emma. Write down what you are thinking: How do you feel about the opera? What are the people around you like? What do you think of Charles? How do you feel after seeing Léon?

After reading

- 26 **Pair work:** Put students into pairs. One is Rodolphe and one is Emma in Chapter 10 as they start writing letters to each other every night.
Student A: You are Rodolphe. Write your first letter to Emma. Tell her how you feel about her.
Student B: You are Emma. Write a letter to Rodolphe telling him how important he is to you and how you have always dreamt of having someone like him by your side.
When you finish writing your letter, give it to your partner. He or she reads it and answers it.
- 27 **Discuss:** Put students into pairs. They discuss how all the most important events in Chapter 11 would have changed if Rodolphe's letter to Emma had been another love letter. Then they write their ideas down. Ask some students to read their new versions of Chapter 11 to the rest of the class. What do they think of them?
- 28 **Pair work and role play:** Put students into pairs. They imagine they are Léon and his best friend. They meet right after Léon has met Emma at the opera. Together they plan what Léon is going to say and do on his date with Emma the following evening.
- 29 **Group work and discuss:** Put these names on the board: Rodolphe Boulanger, Monsieur Lheureux, Léon Dupuis. Ask students to discuss the following in small groups:
How does Flaubert develop their characters through their actions? How does Flaubert appear to feel about these characters? What do they represent?
Ask the groups to report back to the class.

Chapters 13–16

Before reading

- 30 **Predict and group work:** Before students read Chapter 13, discuss how the lives of Emma, Charles and Léon will change in the few months after Emma and Léon begin their affair. Students write ideas for a chapter that could be included in the book and decide where they would put it.

While reading

- 31 **Read, check and group work:** Ask students to work in the same groups as in activity 30 and to compare the events in the chapters they wrote with those in the book. How close were they in their predictions?
- 32 **Pair work and guess:** Ask students to read Chapter 14 up to page 82. Put them into pairs. Each student chooses to be one of the characters in Chapter 14 without telling their partner who they are. They imagine they meet at a shop in Rouen. They have a conversation about what they are doing there, and try to find out who the other is.
- 33 **Write:** Ask students to imagine they are Emma in Chapter 15. She is desperate. They write her last letter to her husband.

After reading

- 34 **Write:** Tell students to imagine they are Emma and to re-read Chapter 13. They write in her diary how she feels about her debts, Monsieur Lheureux, his attitude, and his idea that she should manage the family's finances, her feelings for Léon, her loneliness, etc.
- 35 **Pair work and discuss:** Put students into pairs to discuss these questions:
a *Why does Flaubert have Emma say, 'These lawyers are nearly as bad as the criminals they work with?' (page 74)*
b *In what ways does lying become almost a hobby for Emma?*
c *Why does Flaubert say that 'Fate is to blame!' was the only thing Charles ever said?*
- 36 **Group work and discuss:** Organise a debate with the whole class. Ask students the following:
What do you think Emma's life would have been like if she had not read so many romantic novels? Did her reading influence her in the same way that TV influences people today?

Vocabulary activities

For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.