North and South

Elizabeth Gaskell

About the author
Elizabeth Gaskell (1810–1865) is best known for her novels depicting scenes of English country life which also often highlight the huge social divide between rich and poor.

Born in Chelsea in 1810, Elizabeth Gaskell was the daughter of William Stevenson, a civil servant and former Unitarian minister. She spent most of her childhood, however, under the guardianship of an aunt who lived in Knutsford in Cheshire, a small country town near Manchester. Apart from a couple of years spent at school in Stratford-upon-Avon, she lived with various relatives in the north of England until her marriage in 1832 to the Reverend William Gaskell, who was to become the famous minister of the Unitarian Chapel in Manchester’s Cross Street. Their marriage was largely very happy, producing four daughters and a son. However, the son died in infancy and it is thought that her first success, Mary Barton, was written in an attempt to relieve her sadness.

Following the success of Mary Barton, Charles Dickens invited Mrs Gaskell to contribute to his periodical Household Words, for which she wrote fiction for thirteen years.

She had many friends, and she was especially close to Charlotte Bronte, corresponding with her regularly after their first meeting in 1850. After Bronte’s death in 1855, Elizabeth Gaskell wrote the celebrated biography, The Life of Charlotte Bronte (1857).

Her full length novels are Cranford (1853), Ruth (1853), North and South (1855), Sylvia’s Lovers (1863) and the novella Cousin Phillis (1864). Her final novel, Wives and Daughters (1866) was left unfinished when she died suddenly of heart failure in November 1865.

Gaskell led a very busy family and social life and was engaged in many works of charity with her husband. Compared to her friends Charles Dickens and Charlotte Bronte, Elizabeth Gaskell may not be remembered as much as they are, yet she is one of the most highly-regarded British Victorian novelists.

Summary
This story tells of the relationship between Margaret Hale, a young middle class woman from the south, and John Thornton, a mill owner in Milton, a fictional industrial town in the north (the town is modelled on Manchester). It also deals with the relationship of workers and masters.

Chapter 1: Margaret is at her Aunt Shaw’s house in London where she has been living for ten years. Her cousin Edith will soon marry Captain Lennox and live in Greece after the wedding. After ten years of London life, Margaret will go back to the quiet country vicarage where her parents live. Mr Henry Lennox, the Captain’s brother, is interested in Margaret.

Chapter 2: Margaret returns home to Helstone. Things are not as pleasant as they used to be. Henry Lennox visits and confesses his love for Margaret, but she refuses him. Mr Hale is a lowly clergyman in the Church of England and has serious doubts about the authority of the Church. He decides to resign his position and move the family to Milton-Northern, an industrial town in the north of England. Dixon, the family’s servant, goes with them.

Chapter 3: Mr Hale’s friend, Mr Bell, who is an academic in Oxford and owns properties in Milton, his hometown, helps Mr Hale and Margaret find a suitable house in Milton-Northern. Margaret meets Mr Thornton for the first time. He is a manufacturer and runs a mill in Milton. He is Mr Bell’s tenant and becomes a friend and student of Mr Hale’s. Mr Hale starts to earn a living as a private tutor, and their new life begins. Margaret meets a factory worker, Nicholas Higgins and his daughter Bessy.

Chapter 4: Mr Thornton comes to the Hales’ house for tea. Margaret is so graceful that he can’t take his eyes off her. Mr Hale and Mr Thornton discuss the relationship between the mill owners and the workers. Margaret and Mr Thornton talk about the differences between the north and south as well as between middle-class people and people in trade. Margaret goes to Bessy’s house and learns that her illness is caused by unhealthy working conditions. Mrs Hale is also becoming more and more unwell.
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tells Margaret that Frederick lives in Spain. Frederick is Margaret’s brother, who cannot live in England since he is wanted by the police because he had taken part in a mutiny.

Chapter 5: Mrs Thornton, Mr Thornton’s mother, and Fanny, his sister, visit the Hales, and Mr Hale and Margaret visit the Thorntons in return. Mr Hale and Mr Thornton discuss the strike, which is about to begin. Mr Thornton plans to bring in workers from Ireland if the strike goes on too long. Margaret visits Bessy and talks about the strike as well.

Chapter 6: The doctor tells Margaret the truth about Mrs Hale’s very serious illness from which she is likely to die soon, and she and her mother get closer than ever. Margaret hides the truth from her father as she thinks he cannot handle it. Margaret visits Bessy, and learns that John Boucher, one of the strikers, has suddenly died and his family is suffering. Later that week Mrs Hale’s condition deteriorates, and Mr Hale learns the truth. The doctor suggests the Hales could borrow a water-bed from the Thornton as it might help Mrs Hale.

Chapter 7: Margaret goes to the Thorntons to ask for a water-bed, but she arrived there at a bad time. The strikers are angry with Mr Thornton, who brought in workers from Ireland, and a riot starts. Margaret gets hurt, trying to save Mr Thornton. Mr Thornton visits her the next day and expresses his feelings for her and proposes marriage. Margaret refuses him bluntly, but he realises that nothing can stop him from loving her.

Chapter 8: Mrs Hale wishes to see Frederick before she dies. Margaret writes to Frederick, informing him of her mother’s wish. Frederick returns just in time to see Mrs Hale, but shortly after he sees her she dies. He has to leave before the funeral as he is in great danger of being caught by the police. Margaret goes to the station to see him off at night. Mr Thornton sees them near the station, and he thinks the man with Margaret may be her lover. At the station a man called Leonards recognises Frederick and tries to catch him, and Frederick pushes him away. He falls off the platform. Frederick sets off to London to see Henry Lennox, who is a lawyer, about finding witnesses to support him in a court case about his part in the mutiny.

Chapter 10: The police inspector comes to see Margaret because Leonards has died after a fall at the station. Someone has seen her there. Margaret denies this, fearing that Frederick may be exposed. The police inspector asks Mr Thornton for his advice since he is the magistrate who had seen Leonards that night. He makes the decision not to hold an inquest so that Margaret will be protected from being shamed in public. But he wonders why she has lied about being at the station and who the young man is. Realising what Mr Thornton has done for her, Margaret starts thinking about her feelings towards him.

Chapter 11: Mrs Thornton visits Margaret to keep her promise to her mother. She admonishes Margaret not for telling a lie but for walking with a gentleman in the evening. Margaret feels insulted. Later she examines her own feelings and realises she loves Mr Thornton, but she thinks it’s too late as he no longer loves her. Meanwhile Mr Thornton visits Nicholas Higgins to offer him work despite the fact that he took part in the strike. Margaret is impressed by this but tries hard to pretend that she doesn’t care about him, not realising he still cares about her. Mr Bell suspects something is going on between Mr Thornton and Margaret.

Chapter 12: Letters from Frederick tell Margaret that Henry Lennox cannot help him find the witnesses for the truth about the mutiny. Now he can never return to England, but he’s happily married to a girl in Spain. Mr Hale starts to have difficulty in breathing, and Mr Bell invites him to Oxford. Mr Hale dies there. Mrs Shaw comes to Milton to take Margaret to London. Devastated Margaret says goodbye to people in Milton. Mr Thornton is still in love with her, but he lets her go.

Chapter 13: Her new life in London is boring for Margaret. Mr Bell suffers a heart attack and dies before Margaret can get to Oxford to see him. As Mr Bell has told Mr Hale before he dies, Margaret inherits Mr Bell’s money and possessions. Henry Lennox becomes her legal adviser, and it seems they are starting to grow closer to each other.
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Chapter 14: In Milton, Mr Thornton finally learns the truth about why Margaret has lied. Unfortunately his financial troubles have become very serious. He comes to London to see Henry to discuss business matters as he can no longer continue paying rent for the mill. Margaret, as his new landlady, offers to lend him money as a business proposition so that he won’t have to close down the mill. Realising her love for him, Mr Thornton proposes to her again and she accepts. They are together at last.

Discussion activities

Chapters 1–2

Before reading

1 Discuss: Talk about the book cover. Have students look at the front cover of the book and answer the following questions: How old do you think she is? What’s she wearing? What do you think she does every day? Is it snowing?

2 Discuss and write: Put students into small groups. Have them look at the Contents page. Tell them to read the chapter titles and try to create a love story that fits the title. Ask them to write one or two sentences for each chapter title. Later in class, ask groups to read out their story.

3 Get ready: Bring in a map of Europe and England. Have students look for the following places: the Greek island of Corfu, London, Helstone, Manchester, Oxford and Cromer. Tell students that Milton in the story is modelled on Manchester. Have them discuss how people travelled in the mid-nineteenth century.

After reading

4 Discuss: Ask students to answer the following questions: (a) How old is Margaret? (b) Where is Edith going after the wedding? (c) Describe Margaret and Edith. How different are they? (d) Describe Captain Lennox and Mr Henry Lennox. How different are they? (e) What is Helstone like?

5 Role play: Put students into pairs. Have them act out the scene in which Edith and Margaret talk about Edith’s future life on the Greek island of Corfu. Student A: You are Edith. You are very excited about living in Corfu. You want Margaret to visit you some time.

Student B: You are Margaret. You are happy for Edith, but you’ll miss her very much. You wish you could visit her, but you probably can’t afford it. You promise to write to her regularly.

6 Discuss: Ask students the following questions: (a) What are the differences between life in London and life in Helstone? (b) Margaret realised something was not right when she returned home. What was wrong? (c) Why did Margaret forget the small, less pleasant details? (d) Why can’t Margaret talk about Frederick? (e) Why did Margaret refuse Mr Henry Lennox? (f) Why does Margaret have to move to Milton?

7 Discuss: Hold a whole-class discussion by asking the following questions: Do you like Margaret? What do you think of her opinion about people in trade? What do you think of her reaction to Mr Henry Lennox?

Chapters 3–4

Before reading

8 Retell: Put students into small groups. Have them take turns to talk about what has happened in the story so far. Later in class, ask students to give a short summary.

After reading

9 Discuss: Have students work in small groups to discuss the following question: Margaret is wondering what her life would have been like if she had agreed to marry Henry Lennox. What is your opinion?

10 Write: Get students to write the story of Mr Thornton’s childhood as if a third person is telling you.
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11 Read carefully: Put students in pairs to go over the first two meetings of Margaret and Mr Thornton. 

What were their impressions? What did they think about the other person?

12 Discuss: Talk about mothers. In small groups, have students talk about Mrs Hale and Mrs Thornton. Ask them the following questions: Do you like Mrs Hale? Do you like Mrs Thornton? Why/Why not? What are they like?

Chapters 5–6

Before reading

13 Discuss: Talk about the characters. Put students into pairs. Tell them to make a list of all the characters they've read about so far and to divide them into two groups – ‘North’ and ‘South’. Write ‘North’ and ‘South’ on the board, and ask pairs to write down the names of the characters. One by one, ask them to describe the character: Who is he/she? What is happening to him/her in the story?

After reading

14 Read carefully: Get students to re-read the discussion on the strike. Ask them the following questions: What is Margaret's opinion about the relationship between the workers and the masters? What is Mr Thornton's opinion on that?

15 Discuss: Lead a whole-class discussion by asking the following questions: Margaret didn't tell Mr Hale the truth about Mrs Hale's illness. Why didn't she? What would you do if you were in her place? What if one of your parents or someone close to you were dying, would you like to know immediately?

16 Discuss: Talk about charity. Have students work in pairs to discuss the following questions: When Margaret heard about John Boucher and his family, she immediately gave some money to them and she sent a basket of food the following day. What do you think of her actions? Would you do the same? What is your opinion on charity in general?

Chapters 7–8

Before reading

17 Discuss: Talk about strikes. Ask students if they have workers' strikes in their own countries. Ask them to describe them: Why are there strikes? How often do people go on strike? How does it end?

After reading

18 Read carefully: Ask students to work in small groups to discuss the strike, the riot and the incident that happened to Margaret during the riot. Guide them with these questions:

   a Why did the workers go on a strike?
   b Why did the leaders of the riot bring the crowd to Marlborough Mill?
   c Why did Mr Thornton go outside?
   d Why did Margaret get injured?

19 Discuss: Talk about Mr Thornton’s declaration of love for Margaret. Have students work in pairs to discuss the following questions: What would you do if you were in Margaret's shoes? What if someone from a different social class or different background told you that he/she loved you? How would you react?

20 Compare and contrast: Some people say Mr Thornton reminds them of Mr Darcy from Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice (Pride and Prejudice is available as a Penguin Reader, Level 5). Ask students if they have ever read Pride and Prejudice either in English or in their language. Ask the students who know the story to tell the class who Mr Darcy is and what the storyline is. What are the similarities between Mr Thornton and Mr Darcy? What are the differences?

21 Write: Brainstorm what kind of things Edith wrote in her letter to Margaret (page 50). Ask students to imagine what Edith's life is like in Corfu. Ask them why they think Edith is insisting that Margaret and her mother (but not her father) should come and stay with her for at least three months. Use the board to note down the possible suggestions. Then tell students to imagine they are Edith and to write the letter.

Chapters 9–10

Before reading

22 Guess: Put students into pairs. Ask the students to imagine what is going to happen to Nicholas Higgins now the strike is over. Later each pair can share their ideas with the rest of the class.

After reading

23 Discuss: Students work in pairs to answer the following questions: Regarding Frederick, do you think Margaret did the right thing all along? How could she have acted differently? After the pairs have discussed this, hold a whole-class discussion.

24 Research: Talk about social class differences in England in the mid-nineteenth century. Put students into small groups. Have them go over the story so far in order to write down the differences in social classes that are shown. Have them discuss what makes the differences. Then ask them to use the library, the Internet and/or other references, so that they can collect some information on social classes in England. When they are ready, ask groups to make a presentation in class to show what they found out.

Chapters 11–12

Before reading

25 Write: Tell students to imagine that they are Margaret. Get students to write her diary on the day that the police inspector came to see her. Give them the following instructions: Write down Margaret's thoughts and feelings. She was worried about Frederick. She had to lie to the police inspector. She found out that Mr Thornton had saved her. She was upset and
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distressed. Try to find the reasons for her actions and examine her feelings. Later, ask some students to read out their diary or make a classroom display so that they can read other students’ work.

**After reading**

**26 Role play:** Put students into small groups to act out the conversation between Mrs Thornton and Mr Thornton (pages 69–70). Have students discuss what Mr Thornton knows, what he is thinking about and how he is feeling about it, so that they can decide Mr Thornton’s movements, body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, etc. Students go through the same process for Mrs Thornton as well. Even though only two people need to act, the rest of the group members can direct the acting. Monitor the students while they are discussing and practising. Later ask groups to perform in front of the class. Encourage students to make comments on the performances of other groups.

**27 Discuss:** Have students work in pairs to discuss the following questions: *Although Margaret has realised her true feelings for Mr Thornton, she speaks to him coldly, forcing herself to appear uninterested* (pages 74–75). *Why do you think she does so? What is the logic behind it? If you were in Margaret’s shoes, what would you do?* Later ask some students to present their opinions to the rest of the class.

**28 Read carefully:** Remind students that Mr Bell has noticed some signs that Margaret cares for Mr Thornton (page 78). Working individually, students re-read pages 75–78 in order to identify these signs. When they are ready, put students into pairs so that they can compare their answers. Then check their answers in class.

**29 Discuss:** Ask students what they think about the story of a dining-room for the workers at Marlborough Mill. Lead a whole-class discussion by asking the following questions: *What are the benefits to the workers and to Mr Thornton? Would you want to work at a place where there’s a dining-room for the workers? Why/Why not?* 

**30 Discuss:** Have students work in pairs to discuss the following questions: *Why do you think Margaret wrote, ‘Margaret Hale is not a girl to say no.’? What is she going to do?*

**Chapters 13–14**

**Before reading**

**31 Predict:** Put students into small groups. Write down the following characters: Margaret, Dixon, Edith, Aunt Shaw, Mr Lennox, Mr Thornton, Mrs Thornton, Nicholas Higgins, Mary Higgins and Mr Bell. Have them guess what will happen to each character. Ask them to write down their ideas, and they can read them out to the class. Tell them to keep their notes for later (activity 33).

**While reading**

**32 Discuss:** At the end of Chapter 13, ask students the following question: *Do you think Henry Lennox has a chance of winning Margaret?*

**After reading**

**33 Check:** Tell students to go back to the notes they wrote in activity 31. Were they right? Ask some students to report how similar or different the consequences were.

**34 Read carefully:** Have students work individually to identify the reasons why Mr Thornton’s business has failed.

**35 Discuss:** Put students into pairs, and have them discuss the following questions: *Do you think Edith knows Margaret’s true feelings for Mr Thornton? Why doesn’t she want Henry Lennox to give up hope? What has Margaret been writing (or not writing) about in the letters to Edith?*

**36 Discuss:** Talk about Mr Henry Lennox. Put students into small groups. Ask them the following questions: *Why do you think Mr Henry Lennox didn’t keep his appointment? What do you think of him? Do you like him? Why/Why not?*

**37 Role play:** Tell students to work in pairs and act out the following conversation:  
**Student A:** You are Margaret. You want to tell Edith about Mr Thornton. Apologise for not telling her about what has happened between Mr Thornton and you before. You want her to visit Milton some day.  
**Student B:** You are Edith. You are shocked but happy for Margaret. You are a little bit annoyed because Margaret has never told you about their relationship before. You are disappointed because you wanted Margaret to live near you.

**Extra activities**

**38 Read carefully:** Have students work in pairs to find the following scenes from the book: *There are scenes where shaking hands took place (or didn’t take place successfully) between Mr Thornton and Margaret. Go back to the book, and find the scenes.* Ask students to tell the class what exactly happened in each scene.

**39 Discuss:** Put students into small groups. Have them ask and answer the following questions:  
- a How has Margaret changed?  
- b How has Mr Thornton changed?

**40 Retell:** Tell students to go back to the Contents page. Have them look at the chapter titles. Ask them to give you a short summary chapter by chapter. Put students into small groups and assign the chapters to each group. Ask them to read out the summary, and the rest of the class can judge if any important information is missing.

**Vocabulary activities**

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