Before Reading

BEFORE READING ACTIVITIES (PAGE 123)

ACTIVITY 1 BEFORE READING
The best answer is number 3.

ACTIVITY 2 BEFORE READING
Encourage students to discuss the effect of the exaggeration here. Is the effect gloomy, or humorous? Are we meant to take these opinions seriously? (In her novel, Stella Gibbons is in fact mocking a particular kind of ‘rural’ fiction that is full of earthy passions and tragic events.) Encourage students to give responses to the statements that react to the exaggeration, not just contradict the opinion. There are many ways of doing this, but these would be examples of the style of response.
1 Why are they bound to be? Why on earth should living on a Sussex farm make people especially miserable?
2 There’s nothing wrong in that. They might be much nicer than people who live in towns and who think they are terribly clever and sophisticated.
3 It is the nature of fields to be muddy and of cowsheds to be smelly!
4 Anybody can be moody, or quarrelsome, or confused some of the time. Nobody’s like that all the time.
5 It can’t always be raining – even in England, surely? And even on a Sussex farm there must be something to laugh about.

ACTIVITY 3 BEFORE READING
Encourage speculation and discussion, and encourage students to say which ending they would prefer, and why. In fact, number 3 is closest to the actual ending, but do not tell students that. They will find out when they finish the book.

While Reading

CHAPTERS 1 AND 2 WHILE READING
1 Flora Poste had inherited from her parents an income of a hundred pounds a year, and no property. ( . . . from her father a strong determination and from her mother an attractive ankle.)
2 Mary Smiling’s hobby (interest in life) was collecting all kinds of brassières.
3 Flora had not cared about team games, and was a very unenthusiastic player.
4 Flora intended to ask her relations to provide her with a home, and Mrs Smiling was shocked by this plan.
5 Charles, Flora’s second cousin, was amused by her plan.
6 Flora mentioned the non-existent parrot as a joke, because she disliked endless goodbyes.
7 Adam begged Miss Judith not to send him to meet Flora at the station.
8 Breakfast at the farmhouse was a silent, miserable (gloomy) meal.
9 Flora sent Mrs Smiling a telegram, saying her worst fears had been realized.

CHAPTERS 3 AND 4 WHILE READING
1 Reuben to Adam, about the cow Hopeless, whose leg had fallen off.
2 Adam to Flora, about old Mrs Starkadder.
3 Flora to Adam, about a little mop which Adam could use for doing the washing-up more effectively and quickly.
4 Judith to Flora, about her refusal to explain the great wrong that her man did to Flora’s father.
5 Meriam, the hired girl, to Flora, about the precautions Flora had suggested for avoiding getting pregnant.
6 Mrs Beetle to Flora, about her plans for her daughter’s four illegitimate children.
7 Reuben to Flora, about his suspicions that she wanted to take over the farm and would then waste the farm’s profits by paying someone to do the ‘scranletting’ (ploughing) for her.
8 Seth to Flora, about all the film stars in the history of cinema.
9 Amos to the Shaking Brothers (and Sisters) in the church in Beershom, about being burnt by the flames of hell, resulting in unbearable pain for which there would be no relief such as butter.

BEFORE READING CHAPTER 5
Encourage speculation and discussion, but do not confirm or deny students’ guesses at this stage. In fact, Mr Mybug falls in love with Flora and he is just as boring as Flora expects. Flora’s plan for Seth is to turn him into a film star, and Aunt Ada Doom stays in her room largely because it suits her best that way.

CHAPTERS 5 TO 7 WHILE READING
1 Branwell Brontë, the Brontë sisters’ alcoholic brother.
2 Sex.
3 He didn’t use for the dishes, but hung it on the wall above the sink, so that he could admire it.
4 Because Elfine wasn’t the right type for a young country gentleman to marry, so Dick might marry someone else, which would leave Elfine with an uncertain future.
5 Because she was a possessive, jealous, selfish old woman who wanted complete control over her family, and/or because she saw something nasty in the woodshed when she was young, which had affected her brain.
6 Because he realized at last that she wanted to help him take over the farm from his father, and that her idea of persuading Amos to go on a preaching tour was a very good one.
7 To save her from marriage to Urk and to give her a better life.
8 She asked Claud Hart-Harris to get four invitations and be her partner. She took Elfine to London to have her hair done and a dress made, and taught Elfine to behave, think, talk, and dress in ways that would make her acceptable to the Hawk-Monitors.
9 Flora, with Mrs Beetle’s help, had let Big Business the bull out into the field. Everybody kept asking who had let the bull out, so Flora wrote this note and got Adam to attach it to the kitchen door, so that she didn’t have to keep on explaining.
10 The sight of a beautiful woman descending a grand staircase.
11 Because Dick Hawk-Monitor proposed to Elfine, and also made a public announcement of his engagement to his family and the ball guests.
12 The farmhouse windows, which normally would have been dark, were all brightly lit, and Seth’s unpleasant laugh suggests that Aunt Ada Doom has chosen this night to leave her bedroom and come downstairs.

BEFORE READING CHAPTER 8
Encourage students to speculate and to make guesses, but do not tell them the answers. They will find out as they read that numbers 2 and 6 are the only right answers.

CHAPETERS 8 TO 10 WHILE READING
1 Why . . .? To see how many of her family had died during the year, as they were such violent people.
2 What . . .? Elfine’s engagement to Dick Hawk-Monitor, Amos’s decision to leave Cold Comfort and become a travelling preacher, and Urk’s decision to take Meriam to live with him.
3 Who . . .? Reuben.
4 Why . . .? To introduce him to Seth.
5 What . . .? A red-blooded actor with passion, another Clark Gable, a big, good-looking man who appealed to women, and could ride a horse and dig a field as well as look good in evening clothes.
6 Why . . .? Because Mr Neck was taking him to America to make him a film star.
7 Who . . .? Her niece, Flora Poste (Robert Poste’s child).
8 What . . .? She stayed in her bedroom all day, and put little pieces of black cloth over each of her two hundred photographs of Seth.
9 Who . . .? Reuben.
10 Why . . .? Because she thought that a friend of hers, Dr Adolf Müdel, a psychoanalyst, could help Judith by giving her a new interest.
11 Who . . .? Mr Mybug and Rennet.
12 What . . .? She spent about nine hours up there, with no shouting or arguments. She and Aunt Ada ate several meals together, she managed to put Aunt Ada to bed, and she reported that there would be no fuss on the wedding day.

BEFORE READING CHAPTER 11
Encourage students to speculate and to make guesses, but do not tell them the answers. They will find out as they read that numbers 2 and 6 are the only right answers.

After Reading

ACTIVITY 1 AFTER READING
Students can write up the notes how they wish.
Possible paragraphs might be:
1+9 Amos
Amos is more interested in religion than in the farm. He’s always talking about hell fire and sinners, and is certainly quite an artist in performance when preaching to the Brothers. He doesn’t get on well with Reuben, and I think it would be an excellent idea if he bought a Ford van and went on a long preaching tour round the country. Then he would be out of the way, which would make it much easier for me to make changes on the farm.
2+8 Elfine
I must rescue Elfine as soon as possible. She’s in love with Dick Hawk-Monitor, but she has no chance of marrying him while she writes poetry and wanders about the hills all day, wearing a most unsuitable shade of green! I shall have to train her to change everything – her dress, her attitude, and her behaviour. With her hair cut and in a nice dress, I’m sure she would look quite lovely, and with any luck Dick Hawk-Monitor will propose to her at the ball.
3+7 Reuben
Reuben seems to have no interests apart from his passionate love for his muddy fields and is obviously very eager to manage the farm himself. Now that he’s got over his suspicions of me, he seems quite open to suggestions. If he can persuade his father to leave, he can take over the farm – he’ll probably be a much more efficient manager than Amos, and is more likely to spend money on improvements, which are much needed.
4+12 Seth
Seth really is wasted on a Sussex farm! He has a handsome face, and moves like a wild and beautiful animal. He’s clearly very keen on mollocking (has several illegitimate children, I understand) and has
probably broken the hearts of all the local girls. However, he is fascinated by the cinema, and I'm sure he would make a sensational film actor. I shall introduce him to Earl, who will almost certainly rush him off to Hollywood and make him a star. Then Seth can break millions of women's hearts, all over the world.

5+11 Aunt Ada
Aunt Ada’s main problem seems to be that she saw something nasty in the woodshed (whatever was it, I wonder?) when she was two. She pretends to be mad but it’s obvious to me that she isn’t. She’s in firm control of the farm’s accounts, and everybody has to obey her slightest wish. Without doubt she is my greatest challenge, but – somehow – I intend to persuade her that she could enjoy her old age much more than by just sitting in her bedroom at Cold Comfort. I shall urge her to travel, spend money on herself, be a little bit daring (she would look great in black leather!).

6+10 Judith
Judith’s problem is that she can’t think about anybody except Seth. She has two hundred photographs of him, and now that he’s gone to America, she thinks her life is wasted and empty. She won’t take any care of herself – doesn’t even bother to brush her hair. She definitely needs treatment from a psychoanalyst, and I think Adolf would know just what to do for her. He will give her a new interest which will take her mind off her troubles. She may even begin to enjoy life, who knows?

Activity 2 After Reading

Dear Mary,
I must tell you about the Hawk-Monitor ball, for which, as you know, I’ve been preparing for weeks! However, I’m delighted to report that all my efforts were worth it, because Dick Hawk-Monitor finally proposed to Elfine, and the engagement was announced there and then! Of course, Mrs Hawk-Monitor looked horrified when she heard about it. The poor woman wasn’t expecting anything like that to happen, so I had to have a quiet word with her, in order to put her mind at rest about Elfine. No time to give you any more details, but I promise to write again soon.

Fondest love,
Flora

Activity 3 After Reading

There are several ways of paraphrasing these images. The following are some suggestions:
1. She has complete control over us, and we have no freedom.
2. He can talk so persuasively that no woman can resist him, and I wish that ability could be taken away from him.
3. She’s the only person here who has definite opinions, and knows exactly what she wants or intends to do.
4. You ought to preach to (pass on your message to) a much bigger audience than the Brothers.
5. There are things about me that are worth finding out, if you make the effort to get to know me.
6. I am the one who makes decisions for every member of my family. (The whole family is in my power.)
7. I shall go, too, to watch you and make sure that you are all right (that everything goes well / that you behave properly).
8. There is no meaning to my life. I was once a container for my child, but now I am useless, unneeded, without purpose.

Activity 4 After Reading

Acceptable answers to this cloze passage are any words that have an appropriate meaning and fit the grammar of the sentence. Students might like to check each other’s work and discuss alternative answers. Some alternatives are given below.
Oh, you’ll never believe what happened up at the farm last night. Are you listening to me, Tom? That Miss (Flora) Poste – you know, the young lady from London – came home in a hired car at two o’clock in the morning, with Seth and Elfine. They were all in evening clothes – that Elfine looked so lovely (beautiful) in her long white dress – and they’d all been to a ball in Godmere, given (held) by the Hawk-Monitors. It was bad luck for them that old Mrs Starkadder had come downstairs that evening to have (bold) the family party – the Counting, as she calls it.

Anyway, when Miss Poste came in, she announced that Elfine was engaged to the young Hawk-Monitor boy! You can imagine the shouting and screaming and swearing about that! The old lady was trying to hit everybody with her magazine, shouting about something nasty in the woodshed. I (You) never heard such a noise (fuss)! Miss Poste stayed quite calm (cool), of course.

You’ll never guess what happened next. Amos announced (said) he was leaving! He’s going (planning) to go round the country (countryside) in a Ford van, preaching to what he calls sinners! He’s an old sinner himself, that’s my opinion.

Then, as if that wasn’t enough excitement (fun, etc.) for one evening, that nasty (horrible, etc.) little Urk took our young (daughter) Meriam off to the well, to show her to bis (the) water-voles. That means there’ll be another member of the jazz band soon, unless she takes (follows) Miss Poste’s advice...
ACTIVITY 5  AFTER READING
Students can complete this dialogue how they like.
Suggested answers:
AUNT ADA: Listen to me, Robert Poste’s child! I saw
something nasty in the woodshed, when I was
only—
FLORA: I’m sure it was very upsetting, Aunt Ada,
but it was a long time ago. Don’t you think it’s
time to forget it now?
AUNT ADA: How can I forget it? I’ll remember it till I
die!
FLORA: You mustn’t talk about dying. You should
try to enjoy life more. Life can be fun, you know.
AUNT ADA: Fun? How can life be fun? What do you
mean, girl?
FLORA: Well, have a look at this magazine, for a
start.
AUNT ADA: Why would I be interested in a fashion
magazine? I’ve worn the same clothes for twenty
years!
FLORA: Well, quite, I had noticed. But look at this
elegant trouser suit on page 20. It would really
suit you!
AUNT ADA: Page 20, you say? Hmm . . . Trousers – eh?
In black leather?! That’s a bit young for me, isn’t it?
FLORA: Not at all – you’ve still got great legs, Aunt
Ada!
AUNT ADA: Yes, I’ve always had rather good legs,
though I say so myself. But I never go out, so why
buy fashionable clothes?
FLORA: Well, that was my next point, in fact. I
really think you should get out and about a bit
more.
AUNT ADA: You mean, go to Howling and Beershorn
more often?
FLORA: Actually, I was thinking of your going a bit
further than that. Paris, say.
AUNT ADA: Paris? Me – go to Paris? But where would
I stay?
FLORA: I can strongly recommend the Hotel
Miramar. Have a look at the brochure. It’s very
comfortable, quite luxurious, in fact.
AUNT ADA: Yes, it does look very luxurious. I think I
might enjoy that. And how would I get to Paris, my
dear?
FLORA: I think you should fly there, in a private
plane. Much more convenient than trains and
boats.
AUNT ADA: Fly? In a private plane? My dear girl! I
couldn’t possibly do a thing like that . . . Could I?
Mmm . . . Let’s have another look at that black
leather trouser suit . . .

ACTIVITY 6  AFTER READING
Encourage students to use their imagination when
inventing Flora’s replies. Some ideas are given
below, but students can write whatever they like.
1 From Aunt Ada.
Flora’s reply: Excellent idea! Sounds most interesting.
Accept at once. Bring back some cushions and carpets
for sitting-room.
2 From Judith.
Flora’s reply: Most important not to miss eastern
European churches – Prague and Budapest particularly
fine. No need for you to return just yet. All well at
home.
3 From Amos.
Flora’s reply: Second-best suit on its way. What a
wonderful gift for preaching you have – think how
many souls you have saved so far! Will be listening on
Sunday.
4 From Reuben.
Flora’s reply: Delighted. See you at the church. What
would you like as a wedding present?
5 From Elfine.
Flora’s reply: On no account do any such thing.
Promise me to forget about poetry. Practise your riding
instead. If you must have a party, invite some of Dick’s
friends round for tennis.
6 From Seth.
Flora’s reply: Well done! Thanks for the cheque. Knew
you would be a success. Bad luck about the girls,
though.

ACTIVITY 7  AFTER READING
Encourage discussion of students’ personal
opinions.