**Tom Jones**

by Henry Fielding

**SUMMARY**

Tom Jones is one of the greatest novels in the English language. In this Penguin Readers version, the reader will enjoy much of the wit and wisdom of the original.

The novel takes place in England in the 18th century, and begins with a rich, kind-hearted country gentleman, Mr Allworthy, keeping an abandoned baby which he finds in his bed. He calls the child Tom Jones, and brings him up in his house with Blifil, his nephew and heir. As the two boys grow up, the unpleasant Blifil becomes very jealous of Tom. Tom has a habit of getting into trouble, but he is also good-natured, charming and extremely attractive to women. Tom and a neighbour, the wealthy and lovely Sophia Western, fall in love, but Tom is an illegitimate child with little money and Sophia’s father is furious at the thought of their marriage. Then Blifil poisons Mr Allworthy’s mind against Tom, and Tom is banished from the house.

Although Tom’s heart belongs to Sophia, he is easily seduced by a pretty face. On the road to London, and in London itself, he has many amusing adventures. A host of characters scheme for money and love, and the hero’s impulsive nature leads him into serious trouble. However, Tom’s essential goodness eventually saves him, and the lovers are reunited.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Henry Fielding, born in 1707, was a giant in the field of literature. His novels were highly innovative and lead directly to the modern novel; they were more psychologically realistic and the plots were more cleverly constructed than any previous novel. Fielding’s books are very entertaining and they were hugely popular during his lifetime.

Fielding also excelled in other areas. He was a successful dramatist and political journalist. In 1748, he became a magistrate, and in a profession where bribery and corruption were the norm, his integrity was notable. In April 1754, ill health forced him to resign, and he died in September of that same year, at the age of 47.

The great love of Fielding’s life was his first wife, and it is said that Sophia Western, the heroine of Tom Jones, was modelled on her. When Fielding died, his cousin said of him, ‘It is a pity he was not immortal, he was so formed for happiness.’

**BACKGROUND AND THEMES**

Tom Jones is Fielding’s greatest novel. It caused great controversy when it was first published, in 1749, because it contained lively descriptions of sexual infidelity and misbehaviour. Dr Samuel Johnson, the renowned dictionary writer, said to a friend: ‘I am shocked to hear you quote from so vicious a book.’ A year later there were two earthquakes in London, and the Bishop of London described these earthquakes as a sign that God was angry with those who read books such as Tom Jones.

Today, we find little to be shocked at and much to be amused at in this novel. Characters tumble in and out of bed with one another, but nothing is explicit and the story is told with enormous good humour. The famous English poet, Coleridge, said that the novel had one of ‘the most perfect plots ever planned’. Fielding’s training as a dramatist is very evident. The novel has strong elements of ‘farce’ in it, for it is full of amusing and unexpected events. In the tradition of farce, bedroom doors open and shut, and coincidences increase until the final denouement, which is very skilfully prepared for.

Fielding was a man of great humanity and, above all, he hated hypocrisy. His first novel, Shamela (1741), was a literary parody (comic imitation) of a very popular novel, Pamela, written by Samuel Richardson. Fielding felt that the heroine of Pamela was hypocritical and manipulative. He therefore named his heroine, Shamela, coming from the word ‘sham’ meaning ‘pretence’.

One of Fielding’s great innovations is in the area of character and morality. At the time during which Fielding was writing, the public required novels to be very moral, particularly in sexual matters. Consequently, characters were rarely completely believable, since the underlying moral message was all too evident. However, the morality of Fielding’s novels was different. He was indulgent of sexual misbehaviour; instead, his novels emphasize the importance of honesty, kindness and lack of hypocrisy. He was also interested in the theme of justice. Tom...
undergoes terrible injustices, but in the end his essential innocence wins, and love conquers all.

Much of the pleasure derived from Tom Jones comes from the comic imperfection of the characters. The main characters in the book are very real. The hero, Tom, is complex; he is lovable but has many faults. Although Sophia, the woman Tom loves, is beautiful and sweet, she remains quite vulnerable. Fielding explores their motives in great depth, and as a result they are entirely believable. By the end of the novel, Tom is a wiser and better human being - but he remains psychologically realistic.

Other lesser characters are full of eccentricities and are never boring; the author constantly comments on them and laughs at them. They are often driven by their desire for money, sex and position in society. Fielding satirizes these desires, and in doing so makes an amusing and powerful comment on society. Two hundred and fifty years later, Tom Jones remains very readable and hugely enjoyable.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Chapters 1 - 4

In small groups, students describe Tom from the point of view of the following people:
Molly, Square, Mr Western, Mr Allworthy, Blifil

Chapters 9 - 13

There are many kinds of wrongdoing in Tom Jones. In small groups, students list the different kinds of wrongdoing in these chapters - for example, Northampton attempts to kill Mrs Waters.

Chapters 14 - 18

Write the following names in random positions on the blackboard:
Susan, Harriet, Tom, Partridge, Fitzpatrick, Sophia, the Irish Lord, Mrs Miller, Lady Bellaston, Mrs Waters.

In pairs, students draw lines between the characters to show their connections. (E.g., Mrs Miller is connected to Tom because he stays at her house). See which pair can find the most! Students then explain the connections.

Chapter 19 - 23

In pairs/small groups, students choose a scene from these chapters and act it out.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

In small groups, students discuss the following question (pre-teach hypocrisy if necessary):
Which of these descriptions of the book do you most agree with? Give reasons.
(a) Tom Jones is a story of greed, hypocrisy, and deceit.
(b) Tom Jones is a story of love and adventure.

Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the Before you Read sections of exercises at the back of the book.

Chapters 1-4

bastard (n) someone whose parents were not married when they were born
Bible (n) the holy book of the Christian religion
fellow (n) a man
fortune (n) chance, and the good or bad influence that it has on your life
furious (adj) extremely angry
gamekeeper (n) a person whose job is to look after wild animals and birds so that they can be hunted
hang (v) to die by being dropped with a rope around the neck
honour (n) high standards of behaviour that make people respect you
naked (adj) without clothes

Chapters 5-8

disgrace (v) to do something so bad that people lose respect for you, your family or group
will (n) a legal document that says who will get your possessions after you die

Chapters 9-13

barber (n) a person whose job is to cut men’s hair and shave them
inn (n) an old-fashioned pub or hotel, usually in the countryside
maid (n) a female servant
rage (n) a feeling of uncontrollable anger
sword (n) a weapon with a long, pointed blade and a handle

Chapters 14-18

title (n) a name such as ‘lord’ which has been given to someone, or to their father, by the king or queen
mask (n) something that covers all or part of your face to hide it

Chapters 19-23

hypocrisy (n) when you pretend to have better moral principles than you really do

passion (n) a feeling of very strong love

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Activities before reading the book

Individually or in pairs. Read the Introduction at the front of the book, then answer the following questions:

(a) What are the relationships between the following characters in *Tom Jones*?
   - Tom: Mr Allworthy, Sophia
   - Mr Allworthy: Blifil, Mr Western
   - Sophia Western: Tom, Blifil

(b) Write down five different kinds of work that Henry Fielding did in his life.

(c) Why were the following years important in Fielding's life?
   - 1754, 1730, 1707, 1737, 1749

Activities while reading the book

The following activities can be done individually or in pairs (except the discussion questions, which can be done in pairs or groups).

**CHAPTERS 1 – 4**

**Chapters 1 & 2**

Put the following events in the order in which they happened:

(a) Bridget Allworthy marries Captain Blifil.
(b) Mrs Wilkins asks questions in the village about the abandoned child.
(c) Mr Allworthy finds a baby in his bed.
(d) Mr Allworthy puts Mr Partridge on trial.
(e) Captain Blifil dies.
(f) Mr Allworthy's wife dies.
(g) Jenny Jones confesses that she is the baby's mother.
(h) Mr Allworthy goes away to London on business for several months.
(i) Mr and Mrs Blifil have a son.
(j) Jenny Jones nurses Miss Bridget in an illness.
(k) Mr Partridge's wife dies.

**Chapters 3 & 4**

The following sentences are false. Correct them and say what you know about each situation.

(a) Tom is alone when he shoots some birds on a neighbour's land.
(b) The gamekeeper is dismissed because his daughter, Molly, is pregnant.
(c) Mr Thwackum and Mr Square are good friends.
(d) Tom sells his horse because he needs money for himself.
(e) Mrs Blifil dislikes Tom.
(f) Mr Western loves Sophia more than anything else in the world.
(g) Sophia and Tom are in love.
(h) Mr Allworthy gives George Seagrim his job back.
(i) Molly is attacked because she is pregnant.
(j) Master Blifil rescues Molly.

**CHAPTERS 5 – 8**

**Chapters 5 & 6**

Complete the gaps in the following sentences. The bracket at the end of each sentence gives a letter from the missing word. For each sentence write down that letter. Then rearrange these six letters to form a word.

(a) Tom is at ..................... with the Westerns when he hears that Molly is pregnant. (1st letter)
(b) Tom tells Mr ........................ that he is the father of Molly's child. (4th letter)
(c) Sophia falls off a .................. . (1st letter)
(d) Tom rescues her and breaks his .................. . (1st letter)
(e) Tom finally realises that he loves .................. . (2nd letter)
(f) Tom finds Molly in bed with Mr .................. . (1st letter)

**Chapters 7 & 8**

Answer these questions:

(a) In the story so far, how many individuals have died and who were they?
(b) In these chapters there is an attempt to arrange a marriage. Say/write what you know about this situation.
(c) Discuss the following question: What are the advantages and disadvantages of an arranged marriage?

**CHAPTERS 9 – 13**

**Chapters 9 & 10**

Complete the following sentences:

(a) If Sophia hadn't refused to marry Blifil, Mr Western wouldn't ..................
(b) If Blifil hadn't lied to Allworthy about Tom, Allworthy wouldn't ..................
(c) If Tom hadn't stopped to write a letter, Black George wouldn't ..................
(d) If Sophia hadn't been rich, Blifil wouldn't ........... ........................
(e) If Mr Western hadn't arranged the marriage for the next day, Sophia wouldn't ..................
(f) If Northerton hadn't told lies about Sophia, Tom wouldn't ..................

**Chapters 11, 12 & 13**

1 A number of things happen by chance in these chapters. Count how many things happen by chance, then write them down.
2 In small groups, discuss the following question:
Have there been any important events which have
happened by chance in your life? Do you believe that
these chance events are 'meant' to happen in some
way?

CHAPTERS 14 - 18
Chapters 14, 15 & 16
Answer the following questions:
(a) Why won’t Partridge wake Tom up?
(b) Why doesn’t Sophia stay and talk to Tom?
(c) Why does Sophia leave her ring on Tom’s pillow?
(d) Why does Tom leave the inn?
(e) Why does Mr Western rush into Mrs Water’s room?
(f) Why has Harriet left her husband?
(g) Why do Harriet and Sophia travel together?
(h) Why is Harriet not willing to stay at the Irish lord’s
  house?
(i) Why does Tom refuse to spend the money that he
  finds?

Chapters 17 & 18
Lady Bellaston, Sophia and Tom all meet in Lady
Bellaston’s house. Tom leaves, and Lady Bellaston and
Sophia then have a conversation in which neither tells
the truth. Imagine that, instead, they tell each other
what they are really thinking, and what their real
desires are. With a partner, act out that conversation
and then write it down.

CHAPTERS 19 - 23
Chapters 19 & 20
Complete the gaps in this summary of these chapters.
Lady Bellaston and Lord Fellamar plan to
(1) ............ ............. Tom using wicked methods.
Lord Fellamar then (2) ............... Sophia, who is
(3) .................. just in time by the arrival of Mr Western.
To get rid of Lady Bellaston, Tom writes a letter
(4) ............... marriage. She immediately replies,
(5) .............. that she never wishes to see him again.
Mr Western (6) ................. Sophia in her room.
He (7) ................. to allow her to marry Fellamar because
he hates lords. Sophia receives a secret letter from Tom
and (8) ................. to it. Lady Bellaston gives Mrs Western
Tom’s (9)............... , Lady Bellaston suggests to Lord
Fellamar that he should (10) ................. Tom.

Chapter 21
1 Why does Fitzpatrick attack Tom? Choose the correct
answer.
(a) Because he believes that Tom has made love
to Harriet.
(b) Because he believes that Tom has made love to
Jenny Waters.
(c) Because Tom pulls out his sword first.
(d) Because he believes Mrs Fitzpatrick is in love
with Tom.
2 Do you think Tom ought to be in prison for what he has
done?
Discuss this with a partner, and/or write a paragraph
giving your opinion.

Chapters 22 & 23
In Chapters 22 and 23, all is revealed. What do we discover
about the following characters? Write one or two
paragraphs about this.
Tom, Blifil, Jenny Waters, Bridget Blifil, Partridge, Dowling
Did you guess who Tom’s real mother was? If so, what
was it in the story that made you suspect this?

Activities after reading the book
1 Discuss with a partner, and/or write a paragraph in
answer to each question below.
In your opinion:
(a) Who is the wickedest character in the novel?
(b) Who is the funniest character in the novel?
(c) Who is the kindest character in the novel?
(d) Who is the stupidest character in the novel?
2 Imagine that you are going to direct a film of Tom
Jones. Who would you choose to play the following
parts? Give reasons for your choices.
Tom, Sophia, Mr Allworthy, Mr Western, Blifil, Partridge.