**Book report 6 vwo**



**Title:** North and South

**Author:** Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell

**Publisher:** Penguin Books

**Edition:** 2006 Red Classics Edition

**Number of pages:** 571 pages

**Title explanation:** The title tells of the contrast between people and places. Margaret and her family are from the south and move to the north. Almost everything there is completely different.

Margaret favors the south, as life was simpler, the environment healthier and the people were gentler and interested in education.

In the North, the air is dirty, there is poverty and illness and people are rude. Margaret clashes with people and their opinions. Later, however, she learns to admit that the south has its failures too and she feels that Milton is her home.

**Genre:** North and South is a love story and sociological novel.

**Characteristics of genres:** Love Story

a) Love is main theme.

b) Sexuality and relationships

c) Obstacle in the way of relationships

Sociological novel

a) Focus on developments within society.

b) Focus on empowerment of certain groups.

c) Focus on what is wrong in society.

**Location:** Most of the story is set in the fictional town Milton, but the story also takes place in Helstone and London. It is very important to know where it all happens, as the story is mostly about the differences between the northern and southern regions of England. Milton is a manufacturing town, with lots of factories and poverty. Life is harsh. Moving there is shocking to Margaret. Helstone, for Margaret, is at first like something from a poem. It is heaven on earth for her. London is the place where upper class high society is found, Margaret spent quite a few years there.

**Time:** North and South is set around mid-nineteenth century England. It is important to know in which period it is set, as it is about the Industrial Revolution. The results of this revolution are fragmented modernization and enormous consequences for everyone in the world. Because of this time, Mr. Thornton managed to climb up to a factory owner and because of this time, Margaret’s friend Bessy dies. The friends Margaret makes, who are merely poor workers, influence her greatly. It was considered as strange for the upper-class, that someone who was born poor could become rich, or that the poor should deserve sympathy.

The events in the book are all in chronological order.

**Main Character:** The main character is miss Margaret Hale, because the story is about her and what she learns and does. The story is mostly told through her eyes, and her falling in love with Mr. Thornton is very important to the story. She is the one who discovers that people aren’t that different from each other after all, and that she has no right to look down upon Mr. Thornton and the factory workers.

**Secondary Characters:** There are several important secondary characters. The first one being Mr. Thornton. He represents, for Margaret, everything bad about the North and eventually she falls in love with both him and Milton. His mother Mrs. Thornton is important too, for she very involved with her son’s life. She actually dislikes Margaret, and even more so when she refuses her boy’s hand. She cannot understand why Margaret could be so proud, as she herself loves the north.

Then Margaret’s parents are important too, as family was extremely important in Victorian society. It was Mr. Hale’s decision the leave the south and he drags his wife and child with him. He also befriends and teaches Mr. Thornton. Mrs. Hale becomes very ill and later dies. This is devastating to both Margaret and Mr. Hale and might have caused Mr. Hale’s death. There is also Frederick, who is Margaret’s brother. He is on the run for the law, for if he will return he will be hanged. He has to return, because his mother is ill, but it causes trouble for Margaret.

The last two most important people are Bessy and Nicholas Higgins, as they show Margaret their side from the story and are part of the reason why Margaret despises Mr. Thornton so much and are a cause for Margaret’s political views.

**Plot:**

**Ranking:**

**1.** 12 Margaret leaves London and goes back to Helstone.

**2.** 1The Hale family (except Frederick) move to Milton.

**3.** 3 Margaret meets Mr. Thornton.

**4.** 4 Margaret meets and befriends the Higgins’s.

**5.** 5 The workers are on strike, Margaret protects John from attack.

**6.** 2 Mr. Thornton asks Margaret to marry him, she refuses.

**7.** 7 Mrs. Hale falls ill, she wants to see Frederick one last time.

**8.** 11 Frederick has to leave after Mrs. Hale’s death, but people assume he and Margaret are lovers.

**9.** 9 Margaret is questioned about a man’s death, she lies and Thornton finds out.

**10.** 8 Mr. Hale dies.

**11.** 10 Margaret is moved to London, when Mr. Bell makes her his heiress and then dies.

**12.** 6 Mr. Thornton and Margaret reconcile and confess their love.

**Perspective:** It seems that the story is mostly told from Margaret’s point of view, but it does tell it from others too. The reader can see this when, for example, Mrs. Thornton and Mr. Thornton discuss Margaret without her being there. At some points Mr. Thornton’s thoughts about Margaret become clear, like when Margaret is preparing tea and he is absolutely fascinated by it. Poor sod.

So the story is actual told from a third-person omniscient point of view, as the reader is aware of things the characters are not.

**Themes** The two most important themes in North and South would be pride and society & class.

Pride is very much represented by Margaret, as she looks down on Mr. Thornton even though he is richer than she. She thinks of herself as more educated and better mannered, so she won’t accept Mr. Thornton’s hand in marriage. She is very proud. But the people in Milton are proud too. Mrs. Thornton, for example, is extremely proud of her son’s accomplishments and thinks him far too good for that Hale girl. With this theme Mrs. Gaskell makes clear that pride can hold people back, the only way Margaret can be happy is to let go of her pride.

Society and class is represented by the people in North and South. Margaret is more educated, but Mr. Thornton is richer. Mrs. Thornton thinks Margaret is below her, but Margaret thinks Mr. Thornton is below her. The people from the south are also very different from the northern people, because they value different things in life and have other morals. One example is that Mr. Thornton wants to shake Margaret’s hand, but she refuses and doesn’t understand how that insults him. He thinks she refuses because she is proud.

Then there is also the difference in class between the workers and the richer people, which can be seen in the strike. The workers are poor and miserable, but the factory owners think it’s their own fault and that they should be happy with whatever they get. Margaret befriends a few workers, and in Mr. Thornton sort of befriends Mr. Higgins when he comes for work. With this, Mrs. Gaskell seems to suggest that we’re all not so different from one another and that these positions in society are unfair.

**Theme in relation to:** The theme pride relates to Margaret because she is very proud, but also because this in one of the main reasons she refuses to marry John. *‘’But, for all that-for all his savage words, he could have thrown himself at her feet, and kissed the hem of her garment.’’*

The theme society and class relates to Margaret, because of her differences with the folk of the north, but also in regard of her position to her friends Bessy and Mr. Higgins. Margaret thinks that she can call on the Higgins’s whenever she like, because of their positions, but Mr. Higgins quickly sets her right.

*‘’It seemed all at once to take the shape of an impertinence on her part; she read this meaning too in the man’s eyes.’’*