

# Exploring the Theme of Illusion vs. Reality in Madame Bovary Lesson Plan

**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Curriculum Focus:** Literature

**Lesson Duration:** One to two class periods

## ***Student Objectives***

- Explore the theme of illusion versus reality in *Madame Bovary*.
- Identify and list alternate themes in the novel.
- Cite specific examples of illusion versus reality in the novel.

## ***Materials***

- Discovery School video on *unitedstreaming: Great Books: Madame Bovary*  
Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.

Selected clips that support this lesson plan:

- Romantic Discontent: The Marriage of Madame Bovary
  - The Bovarys Attend a Ball and Emma Becomes Bored (and Pregnant)
  - Emma Meets Leon
  - Madame Bovary Meets Monsieur Rodolphe Boulanger of la Huchette
  - The Affair of Emma and Rodolphe
  - Madame Bovary Meets Her Demise
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- *Madame Bovary*, by Gustave Flaubert
  - Books, encyclopedia articles, and other resources about French society in the late 1800s

## ***Procedures***

1. After completing the novel, begin with a general discussion of Emma Bovary. Emma died a prolonged, agonizing death. Why has Flaubert written her death this way? Is he punishing her for her indiscretions? Ask students if they believe Emma is a good mother and wife? Is she a sympathetic character? Why or why not?
2. Now ask students to consider what Emma's decisions and actions tell us about her character. (Before students begin, remind them that during this time period, women had few

opportunities, and a woman’s life was limited to what her husband or father could provide for her.) A few of Emma’s major decisions in the novel include.

**Character Analysis, Part One**

- Leaving her father’s home to marry the country doctor Charles Bovary.
  - Committing adultery.
  - Borrowing large sums of money to purchase clothing and other fineries.
  - Swallowing arsenic.
3. Ask students to brainstorm major themes in the novel. (Remind students that a theme is a recurrent idea that is woven throughout the story; novels often have more than one theme.) Some themes include Romanticism, the materialism of the French bourgeoisie, and the limitations of a woman’s life in the 19th century. Explain that one of the major themes of the novel could be described as illusion versus reality. Ask students to describe how that theme is reflected in the novel, e.g., that many of the characters live in a world of illusion, blind to the realities that surround them.
  4. Ask students to brainstorm examples of this theme within the novel. Draw a T-Chart on the board; under the word “Illusion” in one column, have students cite examples from the novel showing some illusions of Emma and other characters; under the word “Reality” in the other column, explain the reality behind that illusion.

Illusion	Reality
Emma spends money extravagantly, as if it’s unlimited.	The Bovarys have been teetering on the edge of bankruptcy because of Emma’s uncontrolled expenditures.
Emma believes that adultery will free her from the confines of her marriage.	She fails to recognize that upon each new conquest, she is once again bored and unfulfilled.
Emma believes the poison she takes to end her life will not cause her great pain. She expects to swoon and die gracefully, as characters do in her novels.	After taking the poison, Emma falls severely ill and suffers great pain.
Charles is content, believing he and Emma are happily married.	Charles is blinded to Emma’s adultery.
The bourgeoisie, or French middle class, appear to have everything.	From Flaubert’s description, it seems this society has no spiritual or emotional depth.
Homais, awarded the Legion of Honor, is seen as a great man.	Flaubert depicts Homais as a simpering, self-important deceiver.



5. After completing the T-Chart with students, make sure students have copied the information they have gathered on the board into their notebooks.
6. Give the following homework assignment.

### Developing a Theme

In class you discussed examples of the theme of illusion versus reality from the novel *Madame Bovary*. In the chart below, give one example of a character's illusion in the novel, along with the reality behind that illusion. (If you can't come up with a new example, use one discussed in class.) Then find two citations from the novel: one that reflects the illusion and a second that shows the reality. Be sure to write the chapter and page number of each citation.

(illusion description)	(reality description)
(text citation)	(text citation)

### Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students contributed specific examples to the class discussion. They provided a new example of illusion versus reality from those discussed in class and found relevant text citations for their activity sheet.
- **2 points:** Students contributed at least one example to the class discussion. They provided at least one relevant text citation for their activity sheet.
- **1 point:** Students did not contribute to the class discussion. The text citations on their activity sheet were not relevant and did not support the theme.

### Vocabulary

#### adultery

*Definition:* A sexual romance between a married person and someone other than that person's spouse

*Context:* Charles Bovary discovered his wife's adultery when he found Emma's love letters from Rodolphe Boulanger.

#### bourgeois

*Definition:* Relating to the social middle class marked by a concern for material interests and respectability and a tendency toward mediocrity

*Context:* Emma Bovary was not satisfied to be a member of the bourgeois class; she would have preferred to be a member of the aristocracy.

### **duplicitous**

*Definition:* The belying of one's true intentions by deceptive words or actions

*Context:* Emma's duplicitous nature was never more evident than when she lied about taking music lessons.

### **infidelity**

*Definition:* Marital unfaithfulness or an act of unfaithfulness

*Context:* Never aware of his wife's infidelity, Charles Bovary thought Emma was faithful to him.

### **Romanticism**

*Definition:* A literary, artistic, and philosophical movement that originated in the 18th century, characterized by an emphasis on the imagination and emotions

*Context:* Flaubert's novel, Madame Bovary, is a classic example of Romanticism in literature.

## **Academic Standards**

### **National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)**

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association have developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching the English language arts. To view the standards online, go to <http://www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm>.

This lesson plan addresses the following standards:

- Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
- Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

### **Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)**

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit link:

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Language Arts—Reading: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts

## Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the [Discoveryschool.com](http://www.discoveryschool.com) Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>

