Your notes

GCSE English Literature: revision notes

Hobson's Choice

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Plot

- In Salford in 1880, Henry Hobson owns a bootmaker's shop, drinks heavily and bullies his three daughters, Maggie, Alice and Vickey.
- Maggie, 30 and the cleverest, runs the shop. She decides to marry Will Mossop, Hobson's shy but skilled bootmaker.
- Maggie and Will marry and open a rival shop with help from a rich customer, Mrs Hepworth. Maggie uses Hobson's drunken fall into a corn merchant's cellar to get money for her sisters' marriages.
- Hobson becomes ill from drink and needs Maggie. Will, now confident, makes Hobson agree to a **partnership** on Will's terms.

Themes and context

- Gender roles, class, marriage, ambition and power within families.
- Written by Harold Brighouse in 1915, while women campaigned for the vote, and set in 1880. A '**Hobson's choice**' is no real choice at all.

Characters

- Maggie is determined and practical; Will grows from timid to confident; Hobson is a proud tyrant who loses power.

How to get top marks

- Make Maggie your centre. A woman taking control of a business and a marriage in 1880 is the play's real surprise.
- Compare Hobson's fall with Willie's rise to write about class and work.
- Remember it's a **comedy**, so write about how the humour carries Brighouse's ideas.

Key terms

Hobson's choice	A choice with only one real option.
Patriarch	A man who heads and controls a family.
Comedy	A play with a light tone that ends happily.
Partnership	A business owned and run by two or more people.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What is Hobson's trade?
2. Who runs Hobson's shop?
3. Who does Maggie decide to marry?
4. Who helps Maggie and Will start their shop?
5. How does Maggie get money for her sisters' marriages?
6. How does the play end?
7. When was Hobson's Choice written?
8. Which theme does Maggie's control of her marriage show?

Answers

1. Bootmaker
2. Maggie
3. Will Mossop
4. Mrs Hepworth
5. From Hobson's fall into a cellar, which leads to a court case
6. Will makes Hobson agree to a partnership on Will's terms
7. 1915
8. Gender roles being challenged

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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