

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Tender Is the Night

by

### F. Scott Fitzgerald

### Book Information

F. Scott Fitzgerald, Tender Is the Night  
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Set in the late 1920s, this tragic romance relates the story of an actress and an American couple.

**Topics:** Classics, Classics (All); History, Roaring 20s; Popular Groupings, College Bound; Romance, Romance (All)

### Main Characters

Abe North a once-precocious musician friend of the Divers who drinks excessively and decides to leave France to attempt a comeback; he later is beaten to death in New York

Baby (Beth) Warren Nicole's sister, who tries to guide her mentally ill sister's life and fortune, often to the disapproval of Dick Diver, her brother-in-law

Devereux Warren the millionaire father of Nicole who, after losing his young wife, has an incestuous relationship with Nicole; he has her institutionalized after she becomes schizophrenic due to the trauma of the experience

Dick Diver a promising young American psychiatrist who keeps life orderly, stable, and interesting for others but whose life slowly unwinds because of an unrequited love and his increasing reliance on alcohol

Franz Gregorovius a doctor and friend of Dick Diver who treats Nicole Warren; he later opens a clinic with Dick

Nicole Diver a young American millionairess who becomes mentally ill because of an incestuous relationship with her father; she later marries her psychiatrist, but leaves him when she outgrows her need for him

Rosemary Hoyt a very young and newly acclaimed American movie star who falls in love with Dick Diver on the French Riviera and, years later, pursues an affair with him

Tommy Barban a Frenchman and member of the Divers' inner circle of friends, who is in love with Nicole, and later, when Nicole becomes well and leaves Dick, marries her

### Vocabulary

**bromide** sedative

**espadrilles** flat sandals having fabric uppers and a flexible sole

**funicular** cable car

**hacks** taxis

**peignoir** a woman's loose dressing gown

**promenade** a place for strolling

### Synopsis

Although F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* only spans the short time period of a few years, the reader is taken on an epic journey through the lives of Dick and Nicole Diver and their entourage of friends and acquaintances as they live the "good life" on the French Riviera and other fashionable European locations.

The Divers, he an American psychiatrist and she an American millionairess, are the two central characters. Dick's ability to say and do what is proper and entertaining in any and all situations is attractive to everyone whose life he touches. This is certainly true for Rosemary Hoyt, a rising young starlet on the American movie scene. After making the acquaintance of the Divers and their friends on the beach, she is ushered into their circle and promptly falls in love with Dick. Dick, however, is happily married and dismisses Rosemary because she is too young. Although Rosemary speaks of Dick as the love of her life, she is decent enough to refrain from pursuing him. She likes his wife, Nicole, and doesn't want to upset their marriage.

Through the eyes of Fitzgerald's characters, the reader is taken on a tour of post-World War I Europe's most beautiful places, from the mountains to the seashore. But despite the fame and fortune of these characters, each of them has a personal cross to bear, not the least of which is the challenge facing

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Dick and Nicole.

Nicole is a mentally ill woman under the care of one of Dick's colleagues, who manages to mostly regain her sanity through the cathartic activity of writing and sending letters to the handsome young American soldier, Dick Diver, whom she meets in France. Her letters reflect her return to normalcy, and Dick finds himself attracted to her. Despite the warnings of Franz, his friend and colleague, Dick and Nicole get married and buy a house just up the hill from a Riviera beach. It is here that their circle of friends visits them.

Over the course of many months, characters come and go. But Rosemary, who is filming in Europe, appears on the scene often enough for Dick to fall in love with her. Neither character, however, actively rushes into a relationship.

In the meantime, Nicole has a relapse, but then recovers. As she improves, she begins to see her husband as a man with faults instead of the dashing captain who saved her. Dick becomes less involved in practicing medicine and gradually begins to drink more and more. His drinking and obsession for Rosemary diminish his ability to function as a husband and as the capable social facilitator he had previously been. Ironically, as Nicole emerges from the darkness of her mental illness, Dick begins to sink into a kind of depression of his own. Nicole becomes self-confident and no longer needs the safety and support Dick provided. She decides to leave him to marry a longtime friend and admirer.

In the end, Dick agrees to Nicole's leaving, and he returns to America to quietly practice psychiatry in relative obscurity.

## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Initial Understanding

In *Tender is the Night*, Dr. Franz Gregorovius complains to Dick Diver during his visit to Nicole's clinic that he feels the heavy burden of having to live up to the high standards of relatives or countrymen who preceded him. He views it as a somewhat negative influence. Have students discuss any similar "burdens" they feel regarding "following in someone's footsteps" or maintaining someone's previously set "high standards."

*There are obvious pros and cons to this issue. Some people might be spurred on by the challenge to do their best for the family honor. Others might find this a burden because they have different ideas about a career and choices.*

### Literary Analysis

Most readers of *Tender is the Night* would notice the old world flavor that the story conveys. This feeling is accomplished by the romantic setting during a less hectic era in history. The character of Tommy Barban adds to the romanticism of the story in several ways. He loves Nicole but doesn't interfere with her marriage to Dick until the marriage is deteriorating irreparably. He also risks his life to preserve Nicole's privacy by challenging the offensive McKisco to a duel. Have students discuss if there is romanticism and chivalry left in the world, and cite examples.

*The women's liberation movement of the 1970-80s seems to have put a dark face on chivalry. Loyalty and the willingness to stand up for others also seems less prevalent, as is evidenced by the thousands of workers who have been cut from their jobs in recent years, even after many years of service.*

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#### Inferential Comprehension

Rosemary Hoyt is portrayed as the woman over whom Dick Diver obsesses in *Tender is the Night*. Although this obsession occurs over a period of several years, it helps lead to the eventual break-up of Dick's marriage. Have students discuss how this story would be different if Dick had never met the beautiful movie starlet. Would his marriage to Nicole have lasted? Have them give reasons for their answers.

*While Rosemary eventually comes between Dick and Nicole, and they do end their marriage, it's quite possible they would have split up anyway without Rosemary's influence. Part of Nicole's attachment to Dick is based on his ability to ease her through her darkest days. As she gradually returns to normalcy, she becomes more self-confident and finds that she needs Dick less and less. Because of this, it is possible they would have parted ways even without Rosemary.*

#### Constructing Meaning

Dick and Nicole Diver are the central characters in *Tender is the Night*. During the course of the story, their relationship changes to the point where they break up. There are many factors that contribute to this. Have students characterize the Divers' relationship. Then ask them to explain in what way their relationship is like a balancing scale.

*Dick and Nicole's relationship is based on need -- Nicole's need to have Dick support her through her illness, and Dick's need to be the center of attention and affection. A balance thus exists for most of the story. Two things happen, however, to upset the balance. Nicole gradually gets better, and Dick becomes obsessed with Rosemary, but Rosemary, while in love with him, is not obsessed with him. As a result, Nicole emerges and Dick withdraws from his friends and professional obligations. So, even though both characters have changed, a balance is still maintained.*

### Teachable Skills

**Comparing and Contrasting** The main character

in *Tender is the Night*, Dick Diver, changes considerably over the course of the story. He starts as a promising young psychiatrist who is making a name for himself within his profession. Socially, he is the life of the party and everyone's savior. Have students create a before and after poster of Dick in which he is depicted according to his character traits when the story begins and when it ends. Students might also be asked to write a one-page summary of their poster.

**Extending Meaning** The setting for much of *Tender is the Night* is the French Riviera. It is arguably one of the most glamorous vacation spots on earth. Many of today's vacationers are seeking out remote and often pristine locations previously unscathed by human intervention. This has led to a worldwide debate on whether tourists should be banned from some areas. Ask your students to do research on this controversy, then have them choose a side and debate a student who has chosen the opposite side. The activity could be extended by asking students to create solutions that would allow tourism, but reduce its negative impact.

**Making Predictions** Dick and Tommy Barban are both in love with Nicole. However, they have little else in common. Dick is "brilliant" as a psychiatrist, while Tommy, a non-intellectual, seems to live on his past glories. Have students consider Nicole's relationship to Dick, and ask them to predict how successful her new marriage to Tommy will be. They should include reasons to support their opinions. Students should write a one-page account of their predictions.

**Recognizing Cause and Effect** One of the themes of *Tender is the Night* is the destructive effect alcohol has on the personalities and careers of several characters, most notably, Dick Diver and Abe North. Have your students research the effects alcoholism has on our society today, both socially and economically. They should include information on what is being done to combat it, e.g., SADD and MADD organizations. Ask them to give a brief oral report on their findings.