



Pride and Prejudice
by Jane Austen

Questions for Socratic Discussion
by Megan Andrews



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QUICK CARD



<p><i>Reference</i></p>	<p><i>Pride and Prejudice</i>. Jane Austen. (1813) ISBN-13: 978-0486284736</p>
<p><i>Plot</i></p>	<p>When a rich and eligible bachelor, Mr. Bingley, moves into the neighborhood, Elizabeth Bennet's mother aims to throw one of her six daughters into his path. His best friend, Darcy, twice as wealthy as Bingley himself, takes a shine to Elizabeth, but against his will, since she is somewhat beneath him socially. His arrogant slights prejudice Elizabeth against him as their unlikely courtship progresses. Matters are complicated when a military troop replete with base officers is stationed in town, compromising the Bennet girls, in particular Elizabeth's younger sister, Lydia Bennet.</p>
<p><i>Setting</i></p>	<p>Among 19th c. English society Meryton village in Hertfordshire, England, near London Elizabeth's young adulthood</p>
<p><i>Characters</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elizabeth Bennet – (protagonist) twenty-year-old heroine of the story, intelligent and quick-witted. She is determined to marry only for love in a society that makes its matches for social position and security. • Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy – (protagonist) a wealthy 28-year-old bachelor whose haughty manner puts off Elizabeth • Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Bennet – Elizabeth's unhappily married parents • Jane Bennet – Elizabeth's sweet elder sister (22 years), who falls in love with Charles Bingley and pines away when he removes to town • Mary Bennet – one of Elizabeth's younger sisters, who delights in parading her talents at the pianoforte before the neighbors • Catherine Bennet (Kitty) Bennet – Elizabeth's silly and flirtatious 17-year-old sister • Lydia Bennet – Elizabeth's foolish and flirtatious 15-year-old sister, who is preyed upon by the cunning Wickham
<p><i>Characters Cont.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charles Bingley – wealthy and good natured bachelor who falls in love with Jane Bennet • George Wickham – one time protégée of the elder, deceased Darcy, his poor character and gambling habits tempt him to exploit the innocence of young girls • William Collins – Elizabeth's ridiculous 25-year-old cousin, a parson who stands to inherit the Bennet home through entailment. He enjoys the patronage of Lady Catherine De Bourgh, Mr. Darcy's arrogant aunt • Aunt and Uncle Gardiner – Mrs. Bennet's brother and sister-in-law. They take a special interest in the elder Bennet girls and are instrumental in helping the family keep its honor

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Georgiana Darcy – Mr. Darcy’s 16-year-old sister and ward • Charlotte Lucas – Elizabeth’s 27-year-old friend and the wife of Mr. Collins
<i>Conflict</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Man vs. Society; Man vs. Self; Man vs. Man: Will Elizabeth marry for love? • Man vs. Man; Man vs. Society: Will Elizabeth see her sister Jane happily married?
<i>Theme</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inner Character vs. Outer Appearance • The Importance of Reputation • The attributes of a good marriage, a good man, a good love • Marriage for love vs. Social connections • The ill effects of pride (incivility) and prejudice (forming early opinions)
<i>Literary Devices</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sarcasm – a form of verbal irony used to show contempt • Verbal Irony – a figure of speech whereby a speaker says one thing, while meaning the opposite

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: SETTING



In what country or region does the story happen? (1a)

This story takes place in the English countryside of Hertfordshire and Derbyshire. While Austen sets the story in existing regions of England, the more specific houses and manors in which the plot unfolds (namely Longbourne, Lucas Lodge, Netherfield and Pemberley) are imaginary. This blending of fiction and fact makes Austen's story curiously relatable to her audience. While her contemporaries may not have been able to visit the sites of her stories, they must all have recognized the major landmarks of the story: Ramsgate and Westerham, Hertfordshire and Derbyshire.

Perhaps the most significant historic place in Austen's classic is the city of Brighton, scene of Lydia and Wickham's imprudent affair. This seaside resort town, made popular by the Prince Regent, George IV's extravagant construction of Brighton Pavilion, was truly a mecca for socialites and soldiers throughout England. Jane Austen herself visited this city a handful of times over the course of her professional life. She had a singular distaste for the place, writing to her sister, Cassandra, in August of 1796, "Here I am once again in this scene of dissipation and vice, and I begin already to find my morals corrupted." She stated her disgust for the place still more strongly a few years later, writing, "I dread the idea of going to Brighton as much as you do, but I am not without hopes that something may happen to prevent it." No doubt Austen's violent aversion to this town was not only founded in personal experience but compounded by popular contemporary opinion. This widespread association of the place with debauchery and licentiousness marked it as a fit setting for Lydia's disgrace.

What is the mood or atmosphere of the place where the story happens? Is it cheerful and sunny, or dark and bleak? What words or phrases or descriptions does the author use to create this atmosphere? (1d)

Though this is a story about a bustling country town full of unmarried women doomed to lose their fortunes through the laws of the entail, *Pride and Prejudice* presents a vibrant and inviting portrait of a young Regency woman's journey to maturity. Blessed with youth, beauty, and some wit, Elizabeth Bennet is better off than most in her quest for happiness and a secure future, but she aspires to greater joys than a simple marriage of convenience can offer. Often referred to as a "comedy of manners," Austen's classic maintains a light-hearted and mirthful mood even as it illuminates faults and flaws within the societal structure of Regency England.

Indeed, Austen does not flinch at the sobering weaknesses of Regency society's priorities. She writes wryly, "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in

possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife” (3). In this one line, the desperation of the unmarried, untitled woman rings plaintively. Without a husband (and preferably a rich one), a woman has no place of honor in society. Each single gentleman is merely a personified opportunity, a chance for a woman to narrowly avoid destitution.

Yet this female plight, which is truly a bleak predicament, becomes hilarious in Austen’s capable hands. Maintaining a mocking irony throughout, she gently hints at these deeper societal flaws while managing to make the individuals seem ridiculous rather than tragic. The laughter lurking in her tone becomes ever more evident as this opening passage progresses. Austen writes: “However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighborhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters” (3). Instead of lingering on the hopeless status of these unmarried girls, she makes a caricature of their desperate mothers who are eager to snag some hapless, handsome gentleman to save their daughter’s future. Seen in this light, each wealthy man is the unwitting prey of the scheming town-biddies, “the rightful property” of conniving housewives. Austen’s tone as she points out the faulty systems of her society remains lighthearted and even compassionate, lending the work a mirthful, light-hearted mood.

Among what kinds of people is the story set? What is their economic class? How do they live? Are they hopeful? Downtrodden? Depressed? Why? (1h)

The story unfolds in upper and middle class societies. The Bennet family is settled firmly in the middle of the class system, since Mr. Bennet has no title but he has inherited a family estate and as such is a member of the “landed gentry.” Mr. Bennet, however, has not maintained his estate or his financial affairs over the years, and he and his family must therefore live relatively frugally. In addition, his lack of a male heir has placed his five daughters in a tenuous social position. Due to the entailment law which states that land can only pass to the nearest male relative, the Bennet sisters must marry well in order to secure their place in society. For with the eventual passing of their father, their nearest male cousin, Mr. Collins, will inherit the estate, and they will be left to fend for themselves. Thus, though the Bennet sisters enjoy certain social benefits as daughters of a gentleman, they need to marry wisely and well. While this search for an advantageous match lends an air of urgency to their social interactions, the girls are, for the most part, cheerful and optimistic since they are too young yet to have been disillusioned.

Due to their middle class social standing, the Bennets associate with families both high-born and low. Within their own family, their Uncle Gardiner is a tradesman, an attorney who lives in Cheapside, London. Such a connection is perceived as “inferior” to those high-born citizens whom Lizzie and her sisters meet. Similarly, Lizzie’s good friend, Charlotte Lucas, is the daughter of a one-time tradesman. Once successful enough to be invited to court and given a knighthood, Sir William Lucas gloried in his elevated social status by investing his newfound wealth in an ostentatious lodge which he then named after himself: “Lucas Lodge.” Though he joined the ranks of the titled gentry with this extravagant purchase, Sir William Lucas retains those rough and guileless ways

which set him apart from the other nobles. Truthfully, his imprudent investment has left no fortune for Charlotte and her sister. Thus, though they hide behind a grand title, they are as penniless and desirous of a “lucrative” marriage as Lizzie and her sisters. This lends a mercenary air to their social interactions, evidenced by Charlotte’s detached, unromantic view of marriage as a means to financial security.

The Bennets, however, claim acquaintance with truly high-born citizens as well in the form of the Bingleys and Mr. Darcy. Mr. Bingley enjoys a significant income, but his is comparatively new money, as evidenced by the fact that he does not yet have a family estate. He did not inherit his money through a transfer of the family land. Rather he is in the market for such a purchase and exploring Netherfield as just such an investment. Seen in this light, his approach to marriage becomes clearer. With a relatively fresh social standing, he must be careful in his choice of a bride; for an unsuitable woman may tarnish his reputation.

Bingley’s transitional social status sets his friendship with Darcy into stark relief. Darcy is by far the wealthiest and noblest of all the characters in the story. His family has a high pedigree refined by generations of nobility. His aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, lives in a grand, castle-like manor house passed down through generations of de Bourghs. Similarly, Pemberley is a familial estate which Darcy inherited along with the significant sum of 10,000 pounds a year. Darcy’s elevated rank garners respect among nobles and lower classes alike. Bingley respects Darcy as a man, but also regards his station as slightly superior, which may explain the heavy weight he places on Darcy’s opinion.

Darcy’s fine breeding and elevated rank affects his perspective on marriage as well. Just as Lizzie and her sisters must consider the financial state of their prospective marriage partners for the sake of practicality, Darcy must bear the weight of his family name and his societal responsibilities. Even more than Bingley, he must consider how an inferior marriage connection could affect his status, reputation, and heritage.

Is the setting of the story important because of historical events which may have taken place there? How does this help you understand the themes of the story? (1j)

It is important to note that Austen sets her story in contemporary Regency England at which time militia were truly stationed throughout England in case of an outbreak of war with the French. Thus, the militia men who play a key part in the actions of her drama are historically accurate. Though she does not include specific dates for her story, thus keeping it vague enough to focus her readers’ attention on the domestic action of the piece, she does mention that Brighton is a seaside resort where many of the inactive militias gather for sport and merriment.

When does this story happen? (2)

The story takes place over roughly two years in the main character’s young adulthood. Beginning with Mr. Bingley’s arrival “just before Michaelmas,” proceeding through October of the next year when Darcy dines once again at Netherfield, and ending with the joyous double wedding “just before Christmas,” the action spans two years.

In what time of life for the main characters do the events occur? Are they children? Are they just passing into adulthood? Are they already grown up? How does setting the story in this particular time of the characters' lives affect the story? (2e)

Elizabeth and her sisters are (most of them) entering the marriageable age. Jane is perhaps twenty-one or twenty-two and Elizabeth, as she unwillingly admits to an impertinent Lady Catherine, is not yet twenty-one. Meanwhile, her youngest sister, Lydia, is already “out” in society along with the rest of her five sisters, though she is only fifteen years old. Such an early entrance into society is unprecedented, shocking snobs like Lady Catherine, and imprudent in the extreme as it exposes her to unfriendly eyes as a naive, willful, and hopelessly silly flirt. While Lizzy and Jane earn respect and position through their maturity and winning manners, their younger sisters are much too young to be in polite society. They expose their family to derision through their childish behavior.

These youthful struggles and dynamics are essential to the conflict of the story as the internal, domestic drama presents significant coming of age themes.

In contrast, Charlotte Lucas stands at the far edge of the marriageable age. At twenty-seven years of age, Charlotte has begun to fear that she is too plain and penniless to acquire a suitable husband with only her own virtues to recommend her. She hunts for a husband with a single-minded practicality that both amuses and disturbs Elizabeth. Her unromantic insistence on a convenient match, loveless though it may be, underscores her fundamental fear that no one will make her an offer and that she will live to be a burden to her parents.

This urgency to find marriage partner is so prevalent that it colors even Mr. Collins's obsequious proposal to Lizzie. In a misguided attempt to convince his reticent cousin to marry him, he condescends, “in spite of your manifold attractions, it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made you. Your portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo the effects of your loveliness and amiable qualifications” (74). Assuming that Elizabeth struggles with a fear of spinsterhood so strongly that any convenient match will seem like a saving grace to her, Mr. Collins warns her that time is running out. When his dubious reminder of her impending doom fails to move her, he points out her lack of fortune and implies that she cannot even pay anyone to marry her. While this approach is both presumptuous and offensive, Mr. Collins certainly deserves notice for dogged perseverance.

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: CHARACTERS



Who is the story about? (Protagonist) (3)

Elizabeth Bennet is the undisputed protagonist of the story. The second daughter of a middle-class family, she enjoys the admiration and respect of small town Meryton's population. Though Jane is considered the "great beauty" of the family, Elizabeth is proclaimed "very pretty" and "very agreeable" in her turn. She possesses a "lively, playful disposition," which delights in "anything ridiculous" (9). Witty, vivacious, and good-humored, she amuses herself by teasing her mother and sisters, making sport of the neighbors in their overdrawn raptures and tragedies, and confiding her dreams to her sweet, trusting sister Jane.

What does the character do for a living? Is he a professional or a blue-collar worker? Is he wealthy or impoverished? Is he content with his lot in life, or does he long to improve himself, like Pip in Great Expectations?(3h)

At twenty years old, Elizabeth has entered the marriageable age, thus her sole purpose in life (at least according to her small-minded mother) is to snag a handsome and preferably wealthy husband. Aside from her voracious appetite for reading and her keen interest in dancing, Elizabeth has few diversions from this primary goal. Yet she will not be contented with a marriage of pure convenience, an example of which is ever before her eyes in the persons of her own parents. Even as societal obligations encourage Elizabeth and her sisters to settle for financial security as a sufficient reason for marrying, Elizabeth longs for something more fulfilling.

What does the character say about himself to other people? (3j)

Elizabeth, as quick-witted as she is high-spirited, prides herself on being a good judge of character. She chides Jane gently for her trusting, agreeable nature and declares: "You never see a fault in anybody...With your good sense, to be so honestly blind to the follies and nonsense of others...to take the good of everybody's character, and make it still better, and say nothing of the bad, belongs to you alone" (11). In contrast, Lizzie is quick to note flaws, forming opinions of others with alacrity. She believes herself possessed of "more quickness of observation and less pliancy of temper" than her sister Jane and thus thinks herself a better judge of character. Though she agrees with her father's assertion that "one cannot know what a man really is by the end of a fortnight," Lizzie trusts her wits and soon draws fierce conclusions about Mr. Darcy after only one evening's acquaintance.

For all this rash criticism of others, however, Lizzie proves remarkably self-aware. She gives a reason for her hasty judgement of Darcy with a laugh and a self-deprecating smile: “I could easily forgive his pride, if he had not mortified mine” (14). Aware that her opinion of him has been heavily influenced by her own hurt feelings and wounded vanity, she admits her weakness with a winning openness and ease.

She declares herself an avid “studier of character” later, in the drawing room of Netherfield when she assures Bingley that a close study of an “intricate character” is most amusing since “people themselves alter so much, that there is something new to be observed in them forever” (30). Yet for all her self-reported attention to the stories of others, for all her declarations that decisions of character should be made slowly and rationally, Elizabeth forms quick judgments of both Darcy and Wickham and holds to those first impressions with dubious tenacity.

For all this, Elizabeth is ready to admit (theoretically) that her perceptions of others may be flawed. When Caroline Bingley declares her “a great reader” who “takes no pleasure in anything else,” Elizabeth rejoins quickly: “I am not a great reader and I take pleasure in many things” (26). Though in the context of the scene, this comment really does apply to the reading of books and not the study of character, Darcy’s pointed summary of Lizzie’s character later in the scene adds significance to Lizzie’s words. Needled by her witty description of his “propensity to hate everybody,” he proclaims her defect to the whole room: “Yours is willfully to misunderstand them” (40). Perceptive and quick-witted to a point, Elizabeth’s pride leads her to abandon reason in special cases and cling to prejudice bull-headedly instead. With characteristic bluntness, Darcy identifies this central defect in her character from the first.

What do other characters think or say about him? (3k)

As previously mentioned, the people of Meryton speak of Lizzie as a charming, amiable young woman and a “great beauty.” This praise dims, however, when readers consider that these same flatteries are applied to Lizzie’s three younger sisters as well: Lydia, Kitty, and Mary, three of the silliest and most self-absorbed characters in the drama. Yet even beyond the small community of Meryton, Lizzie and her sister Jane are respected and admired. Critical and snobbish as they are, the Bingley sisters cannot help admitting that Jane is a lovely girl whom they would be happy to have as an acquaintance if it were not for her horrifying relations. Similarly, Mr. Darcy honors Lizzie and Jane apart from their family when he points out the scruples and considerations that had previously kept him from declaring his love for Lizzie. He explains that while he feels keenly the inferiority of her relations he acknowledges that she and her sister Jane have “conducted themselves so as to avoid any share of the like censure,” noting both their good sense and their pleasing dispositions (131).

Indeed, Darcy’s perspective on Elizabeth helps to form her character for the reader, since he offers portraits of her personality frequently throughout the story. For the most part, he highlights her flaws with brutal honesty. He declares her proud and vain and unjust in her judgments of others. For all this criticism, he also credits her with nobler feelings such as justice, wisdom, generosity, and even kindness. These positive

traits garner Darcy's respect and love so that he cannot avoid proposing to her, despite all his scruples and pride.

Is the character a “sympathetic character”? Do you identify with him and hope he will succeed? Do you pity him? Do you scorn or despise his weakness in some way? Why? (3q)

Elizabeth is a profoundly relatable character. Flawed and hopelessly blind to her own insufficiencies, she is quick to admit her fault when it is revealed to her and eager to be just in her treatment of others. This balance of virtue and shortfall makes her a sympathetic character and a compelling protagonist.

Who else is the story about? (4)

Mr. Darcy stands by Elizabeth as a key figure in the story. A handsome and wealthy young man, Darcy shoulders his duty and engages with polite members of society for the sake of his family and his heritage, but he loathes the preening, fawning masses of common people. Thanks to his prodigious fortune, however, Darcy needs not trouble himself unduly. Women flock to the flame of his fortune. He could have his pick, yet he scorns them all. Spoiled by a life of privilege, he enters the story badly in need of a mirror in which to glimpse his glaring faults.

Enter Lizzie Bennet. Stung to self-sight by her prompt rebukes, Darcy reveals his true nature as a man of character, sensitivity, and even humility. Challenged to practice social skills which do not come naturally to him, he begins to make an effort at civility and good-humor. He admits that he struggles with pride, bitterness, resentment, and selfishness. This grave self-revelation reveals a still more significant element of his personality: he is unfailingly honorable, honest, and loyal. Loving and faithful to his people, whether they be family or friend, servant or lord, Darcy is an excellent master and an exemplary friend.

Though those who do not know him well consider him unpleasant and proud, his close acquaintances respect and admire him deeply. His house-keeper, who has served his family for generations, declares him to be “the best landlord and the best master.” She elaborates effusively, “There is not one of his tenants or servants but what will give him a good name. Some people call him proud; but I am sure I never saw anything of it. To my fancy, it is only because he does not rattle away like other young men” (161). Though he makes a dreadful first impression, Darcy proves to be a man of character and depth, well-respected by those who know him best.

In addition to these two central figures, the story is populated by a host of colorful side characters whose dramas add greatly to the plot of the story:

Jane- Gentle, meek and mild, Elizabeth's eldest sister believes the best of everyone. Her good opinion is easily won, thus her distrust or censure of any individual should be taken very seriously. Jane is closed and careful in her emotions, often leaving her admirers to guess at her true feelings.

Mr. Bingley-According to a smitten Jane, Mr. Bingley is “everything a young man ought to be.” Good natured and pleasant and eager to please anyone and everyone, he finds his match in Jane.

Mr. and Mrs. Bennet- One of the only models of a mature marriage in the story, these two are a dreadful match. While Mr. Bennet is clever, sarcastic, and a gentleman by birth, his wife is silly, unrefined, and common. Unhappy in their union, the two have settled into a lifetime of resignation and mutual dislike.

Lydia Bennet- The youngest of the Bennet sisters, Lydia has been given much freedom and very little training in the ways of propriety and decorum. She is a wild thing, flirting and flaunting herself through Meryton circles. She is a scandal waiting to happen.

Charlotte Lucas- Daughter of Sir William Lucas of Lucas Lodge and best friend to Elizabeth, Charlotte must marry well, and soon. Nearing the very end of the marriageable age, she is dangerously close to becoming an old maid. Not plagued by any romantic notions, however, she seems satisfied with a marriage of convenience, even if the man in question should be Mr. Collins.

Mr. Collins- As obsequious as he is ridiculous, Mr. Collins is the Bennet’s cousin, who, according to the entail laws of the time, is due to inherit Longbourne on the occasion of Mr. Bennet’s death. Overawed by anyone possessing a fortune and a title, Mr. Collins worships his patroness, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, blind to the fact that she is an overbearing egoist and a self-important meddler. Mr. Bennet declares him to be a tiresome panderer who walks the line between “servility and self-importance” (44).

Is there a single character (or a group of characters) that opposes the protagonist in the story? In other words, is there an antagonist? (4a)

Mr. Wickham proves to be the central antagonist of the piece. While many of the conflicts which drive the story are internal, taking place in the mental and emotional lives of Lizzie and Darcy, almost every external conflict takes place because of the oily machinations of this charmer. Blessed with every appearance of goodness, Wickham finds it easy to make friends and to win the trust of those he meets. Winsome and pleasant, he flatters and flirts his way into the hearts of all the women in Meryton. Beneath this charming exterior, however, he is a conniving, gambling, seducing rake. Just as Darcy’s unpleasant exterior masks a virtuous heart, Wickham’s appearance of goodness disguises his evil intentions. Wickham uses this ironic disconnect between appearance and reality to his own ends, feeding the public’s disgust for Darcy in order to bolster his own social standing.

Initially, Wickham stands between Lizzie and a true understanding of Darcy’s character. Later on, he stands between Lizzie and her family’s future happiness when he seduces Lydia and involves her (and by extension her whole family) in a social suicide of an elopement. As for Darcy, Wickham haunts him, leeching money from the grand estate of Pemberley and threatening his family’s good name.

Has the antagonist always opposed the protagonist? If not, what caused his opposition?

When he first meets Elizabeth, Wickham seems to have true feelings for her. Assured of her faith in his false story about Darcy's cruelty and selfishness, Wickham settles into a pleasant friendship with Elizabeth which she feels might blossom into something more, given the proper encouragement. Yet as Elizabeth learns of Darcy's true character, she loses all respect for Wickham, and he, in turn, reveals his colors, not hesitating to drag Elizabeth and her family into a deadly scandal.

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: CONFLICT AND PLOT



What does the protagonist want? (5)

Elizabeth Bennet longs to be happily married, not just conveniently settled like her parents before her. She expresses this longing outright when she refuses Mr. Collins's proposal. She cries, "I am perfectly serious in my refusal. – You could not make me happy and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who would make you so" (73). Above and beyond the attainment of social standing or financial stability, Lizzie longs to make a good match, to meet her equal in the marriage state and to be able to respect him, flaws and all. This seems an impossible dream as her parents, her friends, and even her suitors proclaim such a match to be a fantasy, unrealistic in the extreme.

In addition, Lizzie wants to be a good judge of character. Priding herself on perception and wisdom, Lizzie wants to have been "right all along" about her instincts where men are concerned: in particular, Mr. Wickham and Mr. Darcy. Even as she wants to be correct about all her snap judgments, Lizzie has a keen sense of justice which will not let her rest if she has misjudged someone. Thus, her own haste in deciding about people rankles with her innate sense of justice. She is her own worst enemy as she learns that she is not as perceptive as she might once have thought.

In an external, practical sense, Lizzie wants Jane and herself to be respected by the world despite the silliness of their connections. She wants happy marriages for both herself and Jane.

Were we to choose Mr. Darcy as the protagonist of the story instead, however, a similar list might be formed. Faced with a woman unlike any he has encountered before, Darcy wants to please her. He admits later in the story that his greatest ambition is to "please a woman worthy of being pleased." Having found just such a woman in Elizabeth, he sets himself to earning her respect and good opinion and, he hopes, her hand in marriage someday. This goal soon leads him to admit feelings he considers improper to his station and to trust her with personal details about family scandals which he would never have thought it advisable to disclose. In addition, the shocking realization that she does not consider him a "gentleman" stings his pride and drives him to re-examine his own character with an intent to improve himself and so become worthy of her.

Is the conflict an external one, having to do with circumstances in the protagonist's physical world, or is it an internal conflict, taking place in his mind and emotions? (5e)

The majority of the conflict Lizzie faces is internal. She struggles to see her own flaws for all her notice of the glaring faults of others. In addition, she struggles to believe that a fit match will appear and that a happy marriage based on mutual respect can exist.

Yet as the story progresses, external conflicts surface. The Bingley sisters and Mr. Darcy conspire to drag Mr. Bingley away from Jane, causing a brief Man vs. Man struggle. Mr. Wickham's seduction and elopement with Lydia causes a very real external conflict as the Bennet family plunges into scandal and disgrace. All chances of advantageous marriages for the other girls seem dashed. This circumstance, however, allows Mr. Darcy to prove himself to Elizabeth and win her heart.

Do his objectives or goals change throughout the story? How? Why? (5f)

While Elizabeth begins the story longing for a happy marriage and a reputation as a good judge of character, she soon finds herself confronted with a much more real and challenging objective: to amend her false judgments and come to a just understanding of herself and her various suitors. This desire for self-improvement is motivated by more than just vanity, however. For, as Elizabeth learns of her own blindness and prejudice, she begins to see Mr. Darcy in a gentler light. With this new sight comes a longing for his good opinion, bestowed so sparingly. She longs to appear to be a good judge of character, a just perceiver, in the eyes of Mr. Darcy in particular. In the same way, she still longs for a happy marriage, but no longer in theory. Now she dreams of a happy marriage with Darcy specifically, feeling that he is a fit match for her in every way. Just when she begins to respect him and tentatively desire his regard, Lydia's scandalous elopement with Wickham threatens to destroy any chance of a happy marriage for her or her sisters once and for all.

Thus, her goals and desires, while the same in essence, become concentrated into one central goal: to win the love and respect of the once abhorrent Mr. Darcy.

For Mr. Darcy, his objective proves unchanging. Indeed, with every new obstacle, his intention to win Elizabeth's affection and respect grows stronger. By the end of the story, he is willingly endangering his family's reputation, enduring Mrs. Bennet's idiocy, and volunteering himself for a lifetime of association with scandal and silliness for the chance to win Elizabeth's hand and heart.

Why can't he have it? (6)

Lizzie's longing for a marriage based on mutual respect and love seems impossible in the face of the social norms of her time. Charlotte Lucas voices the opinion of the times when she considers her upcoming marriage to Mr. Collins as "the only honorable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, [which]... however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want" (83). Even as she acknowledges that this marriage of convenience can hardly bring her happiness, Charlotte congratulates herself on her "good luck." Yet Lizzie hopes for more,

much to the chagrin of her mother. She considers Charlotte's decision to marry Mr. Collins dubiously, "She had always felt that Charlotte's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own, but she could not have supposed it possible that when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage" (85). This sense of betrayal of self, this "sacrifice of better feeling" to "worldly advantage" which Lizzie intimates in this scene reveals her deep disgust for such opportunistic impulses. She longs for a marriage which is foreign to her contemporaries; yet all of society stands in her way. (Man vs. Society)

Even beyond the prejudices and priorities of her society, Elizabeth faces practical impossibilities when she meets a man who might satisfy her wishes. Mr. Darcy possesses all that Lizzie does not: wealth, station, and breeding. Even as she mocks such considerations, he feels these societal inferiorities keenly. Indeed, he explains to her almost immediately upon his first proposal that these considerations still give him pause and pain: "His sense of her inferiority – of its being a degradation – of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding, but was very unlikely to recommend his suit" (125). Thus, in an unlikely romance, Lizzie faces obstacles not only of social disapproval but of hesitation on the part of Darcy. He asks for her hand, but simultaneously disdains to take it in the initial proposal conversation. While Lizzie does not yet desire Darcy's attentions in this scene, their conflicting interests do cause a fleeting element of Man vs. Man conflict.

As for being a good judge of character, Lizzie herself stands in the way. Her own pride and vanity blind her, making her a faulty judge of others and giving her a skewed perspective of herself as well. This blindness and inflated view of her own judgment becomes clear from the beginning of the story when Lizzie agrees wholeheartedly with her father that "one cannot know what a man really is by the end of a fortnight" and then meets Mr. Darcy and proclaims his character "decidedly" after just one evening. Later when she criticizes Darcy for his struggle with bitterness and the dangers of a hasty loss of his good opinion, she does not see the irony of her caution to "judge carefully." Though Lizzie wants desperately to be a good judge of character, she cannot even justly consider her own without Mr. Darcy's help. This is a Man vs. Self conflict.

As previously mentioned, those external things that Lizzie wants: Jane's happiness, Lydia's safe return to the family, the preservation of her family's honor, are threatened more directly by characters like the Bingley sisters and Mr. Wickham. These are Man vs. Man conflicts.

If charted, Mr. Darcy's struggle might prove to be a Man vs. Self conflict. Like Lizzie, Darcy is bound by pride and vanity and guilty of making misguided, blind judgments of others. His pride, insolence, and sense of superiority make him boorish, unpleasant and disdainful of the feelings of others. His own blindness to his state forms the first obstacle to pleasing Lizzie. After his realization however, Darcy must wait for Lizzie herself to acquire self-sight and humility enough to give him another chance. This waiting period constitutes a Man vs. Man conflict.

What other problems are there in the story? Are there other things in the story (people, responsibilities, etc.) that distract the characters from their main goals? (7a)

When Elizabeth meets the handsome and charming Mr. Wickham, she is all too easily won over by his seeming goodness. After a short acquaintance, she fancies herself in love and so credits his flagrant falsehoods with truth and bolsters her prejudices against Darcy. Even as Elizabeth champions Wickham's cause and scorns Darcy, truth penetrates her circle through the most unlikely sources. First Jane reports to Lizzie that her genial and trusting beau, Mr. Bingley himself, warns the Bennet sisters against associations with George Wickham. Yet Lizzie laughs at this unusual negativity from Bingley instead of realizing its significance. Why even Jane (that most trusting and sweet-tempered of creatures) feels a nebulous unrest at this warning from Bingley. Yet Lizzie remains stolidly blind to the truth of George Wickham's seedy character.

In addition to Jane's uncharacteristic suspicion, Miss Caroline Bingley acts on uncharacteristic kindness when she comes to Lizzie to warn her of Wickham's murky past associations with the Darcy family. She vouches for Darcy and declares that Wickham has treated Darcy in an "infamous manner." When Lizzie rejects this information tartly, Caroline responds, "It was kindly meant" (65). Not even shocked to sight by such an unexpected source of goodwill, Lizzie continues in blind faith.

While Lizzie remains infatuated with him, George Wickham manages to poison her against Darcy still further with lies about a lost income (which in truth he gambled away) and cruelties and abuses which were altogether fictional. These lies become obstacles which Darcy must later overcome in order to win Elizabeth's trust and respect.

Even after Lizzie learns the truth of Mr. Wickham from Mr. Darcy, that brigand continues to cause trouble, changing tactics and seducing Lizzie's naïve, youngest sister Lydia instead. Just as he once did with Georgiana Darcy, Wickham convinces Lydia to elope with him and so draws the whole family into scandal in attempt to acquire a rich sum to pay his many debts.

Are there other characters in the story who do not understand the protagonist's motives and ambitions? (7d)

Lizzie's initial desire for a happy marriage seems unrealistic and childish to the more mature, experienced members of her society, but it still resonates with them. Even Charlotte, the most pragmatic and opportunistic of Lizzie's acquaintances acknowledges that a marriage based on love and respect must of course be preferable to a marriage of pure convenience. Yet she considers such a happy situation to be "entirely a matter of chance" (16).

Yet when Lizzie discovers that she might be in love with Mr. Darcy, there is not one character in all the story who will believe her or understand such a desire. So firmly convinced that he is disagreeable and proud, the whole community thinks him the last man in the world whom Lizzie Bennet would ever consider marrying. They cannot know Darcy's depth, his understanding of her character, or the honesty and tenderness with which he shows her his faults...and points out her own.

What happens in the story? (8)

Visiting newlyweds, Charlotte and Mr. Collins, at their parsonage in Kent, Lizzie meets Mr. Darcy unexpectedly. Allegedly visiting Rosings to see his fearsome aunt, Lady Catherine, Darcy seeks an opportunity to speak with Lizzie alone. Discovering her at her cousin's home alone one afternoon, he declares his feelings for her in a famously disastrous proposal. Incensed by his conceit and disdain, Lizzie refuses him without thought for manners or consideration of his feelings. Her pride wounded, she openly declares her opinion of him as not only an arrogant socialite, but also a meddler in the affairs of her sister and Mr. Bingley and a cruel abuser of her trusted friend, Mr. Wickham. No less shocked than angered, Darcy begs pardon and departs.

The very next morning, Darcy delivers a letter into Lizzie's hands. With a few carefully crafted pages, he seeks to expunge the grievous accusations she has placed before him. He apologizes for interfering with Mr. Bingley and Jane's romance. Lizzie scoffs in answer, for as the harm has already been done, his apology can make little difference. He clarifies his former slight on her family, amending his former disgust with a caveat: "you and your sister I must exclude from this." Somewhat mollified, Lizzie grudgingly concedes that his mortifying assessment of her family is accurate. Lastly, Darcy shows remarkable faith in Lizzie's discretion as he reveals the true nature of his dealings with Wickham. Contrary to popular opinion, George Wickham squandered the parish living so generously given him by old Mr. Darcy and then proceeded to seduce young Georgiana Darcy, Mr. Darcy's sister, with the intention of blackmailing Darcy further and sullyng the family reputation. Darcy reveals all this not only to justify himself to Elizabeth, but also to warn her against Wickham's duplicitous character.

How do the protagonist and the antagonist respond to the conflict at first? Do these actions provoke further conflict? (8b)

Shocked by this revelation, Lizzie begins to feel ashamed. Even as she prides herself on clear sight, she realizes how grievously mistaken she has been about their characters all along. She proclaims herself "blind, partial, prejudiced, and absurd" and cries in frustration, "How despicably I have acted! I, who have prided myself on my discernment! – I, who have valued myself on my abilities!" She continues miserably, "How humiliating is this discovery! – Yet, how just a humiliation! – Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly" (137). With sudden lucidity, she catches a glimpse of her true self. Flattered by the attentions of one and offended by the neglect of the other, she allowed vanity to overshadow her reason. Convicted and ashamed, she admits: "Till this moment, I never knew myself." This self-revelation marks a crucial turning point in Lizzie's emotional and intellectual development. From this moment on, she begins to see Darcy in a gentler, more sympathetic light. She even begins to feel grateful for his "mortifying, yet merited reproach," as it brings about a new humility and self-awareness in her.

As a result of these revelations and this change of heart, Elizabeth spurns the renewed attentions of Mr. Wickham upon her return to Meryton, implying emphatically that his previous lies can deceive her no longer and that her perception of Mr. Darcy has

been forever altered. He discontinues pursuit of Lizzy only to begin seducing her silly youngest sister, Lydia, in secret.

**How do the interactions of the characters heighten the tension of the conflict that exists?
(8c)**

Lizzie has cause to tour the Lake District with her aunt and uncle and so comes to visit Pemberley itself. As the house-keeper takes her on a tour, Elizabeth marvels at the steady stream of praise and admiration for her master, Mr. Darcy, who seems by all accounts to be “the best landlord and the best master.” Far from proud and unpleasant, Darcy seems famous in his own country as a genuine gentleman. Even as she thinks wistfully of her wasted chance to be mistress of this vast estate, Mr. Darcy himself appears, throwing Elizabeth into a flurry of consternation and embarrassment. Yet he surprises her still further with such a show of civility and kindness towards her and her low-born aunt and uncle that Elizabeth is quite overcome. Over the course of their short stay in Derbyshire, Mr. Darcy takes pains to make Elizabeth welcome at his estate and to foster a friendship between her and his sister, Georgiana. As each day passes, Elizabeth feels a stronger regard and respect for him.

Just as she begins to hope that Darcy might renew his attentions, Lizzie receives a devastating piece of news from home. Lydia has eloped with the infamous Mr. Wickham and drawn the whole Bennet family into the sordid scandal. While Elizabeth hopes initially that they will be able to recover Lydia, she despairs at the permanent blemish such an affair must place on the family name. All prospects of advantageous marriages seem doomed by the failure. Mr. Darcy happens upon Lizzy soon after she receives the news and wrests the truth from her. Concerned and polite, he takes leave of her. Sure that his previously mentioned scruples about her family’s sullyng effect on his reputation will dissuade him from renewing his attentions to her, Lizzie admits to herself: “never had she so honestly felt that she could have loved him, as now, when all love must be in vain” (180). Thus, while the internal conflicts which kept the two apart now seem resolved, the external conflicts separate them once again.

**How is the main problem solved? How are the protagonist’s obstacles finally overcome?
(9b)**

As Lizzie and her sisters wait worriedly at home, Mr. Bennet and Uncle Gardiner run to London to trace the lovers to their hideout and force them to marry. To their surprise, the sisters soon hear that Wickham has agreed to marry Lydia in exchange for a paltry annual allowance from Mr. Bennet. Mr. Bennet remarks with characteristic shrewdness that some other party must have satisfied Wickham’s chief monetary interests; for no one would take Lydia for less than one thousand pounds. Bewildered by the sudden change of events, the Bennet’s soon welcome Mr. and Mrs. George Wickham back to Longbourne. Amid her preening and bragging, Lydia discloses the true source of her miraculous recovery: Mr. Darcy himself discovered the two and arranged the whole affair so as to avoid scandal. He paid Wickham richly, arranged for his appointment in the militia, and so forced the marriage which silenced the affair as quickly as it had

begun. Stunned by Darcy's willing and thoughtful actions, Lizzie soon begins to feel deeply proud of him. She ruminates joyfully, "in a cause of compassion and honour, he had been able to get the better of himself... it pleased her" (212). Disregarding the scandal his involvement might bring down on his mighty house, Darcy intercedes to save the Bennet family from permanent disgrace and so proves his victory over the self-important pride which Lizzie marked in him so many months before. She notes his self-conscious growth with pride.

What events form the highest point or climax of the story's tension? Are they circumstantial events, or emotional ones? Is the climax a spiritual or physical one?

There are a few moments of climax in the story, which vary depending on which goal or desire of the protagonist one is charting. Elizabeth is the protagonist of the piece. If her chief goal is to know herself and to be a just perceiver of character, then the moment of self-revelation when she receives Mr. Darcy's letter must be considered a climactic moment. She is forever altered by this moment of self-sight, acquiring a humility and honesty which she carries with her through the rest of the piece. If, however, Elizabeth's chief goal is to win back the good opinion of Mr. Darcy, she knows at last that she has his respect and love when she realizes that he is responsible for saving Lydia. In this scene, she sees that he has taken her words to heart and humbled himself to serve her family for her sake.

How does the story end? (10)

Although Lizzy does not dare to hope that Darcy will renew his proposals, one evening, she receives a strange visitor at Longbourne. Lady Catherine de Bourgh comes to brow-beat Elizabeth for the circulation of a "scandalous falsehood" concerning Miss Bennet and her nephew, Mr. Darcy. She demands, "Are you or are you not engaged to my nephew?" Shocked, bewildered, and scarcely daring to hope that there might be truth to the rumor, Elizabeth demurs. But when the old woman demands assurance that Elizabeth will never enter into such an arrangement, Lizzie throws her out of the house with a justified fit of temper. She hopes for a visit from the nephew himself.

How does the solution of the conflict affect each individual character?(10c)

Soon enough, Darcy returns, bringing a penitent and adoring Mr. Bingley back to Jane. This gesture acts as final evidence that Darcy has heeded Lizzie's stinging reproof in its every instance. Even as Jane and Bingley are engaged, Darcy too renews his proposal, and Lizzie accepts with delight.

As they walk together, they review their tumultuous history with sheepish smiles. They admit to one another the deep impact which their heated argument all those months before worked in their development. For her part, Lizzie begs his pardon for her frankness, blindness, and pride. In his turn, Darcy declares: "What did you say of me that I did not deserve? ...my behavior to you at the time merited the severest reproof." Indeed, he goes on to reference the very words which offered him his own moment of self-revelation: "Your reproof, so well-applied, I shall never forget: 'had you behaved in

a more gentleman-like manner.’ Those were your words. You know not, you can scarcely conceive, how they have tortured me” (240). He rejoins at last, “You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You showed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased” (241). With this final repentant phrase, Darcy offers Elizabeth a compliment greater than all the acknowledgements she has hoped for throughout the story. More than just a good judge of character, a possessor of fine eyes, or a small-town wit, he declares her “a woman worthy of being pleased,” which according to his standards amounts to a fair title indeed.

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: THEME



What does the protagonist learn? Is the protagonist changed in his mind or heart by the events of the story? (11a)

Through their tempestuous courtship, both Lizzie and Darcy are forced to honest self-sight. The outworking of this newfound self-knowledge is peculiar. Lizzie herself identifies it as “gratitude.” She ponders this new feeling in her heart: “there was a motive of her goodwill which could not be overlooked. It was gratitude. Gratitude, not merely for having once loved her, but for loving her still well enough, to forgive all the petulance and acrimony of her manner in rejecting him, and all the unjust accusations accompanying her rejection” (172). Instead of despising Darcy’s honesty, Elizabeth feels closer to him than ever before. He identifies with her in her weakness, having faced his own character flaws in that same painful encounter; consequently, his sight of her is tempered with grace and fellowship. Humbled by his clear yet gentle perception of her, Elizabeth feels grateful for his enduring friendship. At this moment, when she feels that her worst self has been exposed to him, she realizes that he has not rejected her as she deserved. Instead he has revealed his own imperfections and joined her in her need of forgiveness and friendship. This honest fellowship between them promises future felicity in marriage. Elizabeth begins at this moment to dream of Darcy renewing his attentions.

This striking transition from arrogance and conceit to humility and gratitude highlights a theme of repentance and grace as necessary elements of any strong relationship.

Does the main character explain to the reader his perspective regarding the events that have transpired? (11e)

Elizabeth and Darcy are each afforded ample opportunity to share their perspectives on the events in the story in the long conversation which follows their engagement. Contented with the prospect of a future together, they laugh at their tumultuous beginnings and practice a new mode of communication: with frank and honest admissions of fault and grateful acceptance of one another, just as they are. Their easy, self-effacing manners promise a healthy marriage with happiness greater than anything which Mr. and Mrs. Bennet might boast.

What is the main idea of the story? How does the author portray the human condition in order to provoke wonder? (13e)

This story is primarily concerned with universal questions like: “What is a good man?” and “What is a good love?” and “What is a good match?” Rather than delivering

pat answers to these questions, Austen articulates the fascinating foibles and flaws of human nature. In so doing, she begs the reader to wonder at the beautiful mess which two independent hearts create as they struggle to see themselves clearly and identify with one another. Her answer to the first question? A good man is one who is humble enough to admit that he is NOT a good man. The second two questions can be answered similarly. According to Austen, a “good love” and a “good match” is one in which both parties know their own flaws and see one another’s, yet extend grace in the face of such imperfections.

The enigmatic quality of grace, portrayed in all its unexpected power, demands wonder.

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT STYLE: LITERARY DEVICES



Does the author use common words and phrases in uncommon ways? (15)

Understatement-Does the author intentionally represent things in language that is less strong than the situation or thing would necessarily warrant for purely rhetorical effect? (For example, in Ian Falconer's *Olivia*, the narrator mentions that Olivia learns to make sandcastles and gets "pretty good." The picture of a sand-cast model of the Empire State Building illustrates this. In *The Biggest Bear*, the author mentions the trappers from the zoo were "a little surprised" to see the boy in the trap with the bear.) (15a)

Austen underscores the ridiculous elements of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's marriage using this helpful literary tool. With a dry, witty tone, she writes of Mr. Bennet: "To his wife he was very little otherwise indebted, than as her ignorance and folly had contributed to his amusement. This is not the sort of happiness which a man would in general wish to owe to his wife; but where other powers of entertainment are wanting, the true philosopher will derive benefit from such as are given" (155). Even as she paints a picture of a marriage so lacking in affection that its parties trammel themselves in opposite sides of the house so as to avoid one another's company, Austen minces her words: "This is not the sort of happiness which a man would wish to owe his wife." Such a dry treatment of the glum arrangement keeps the tone of the story light and humorous.

Similarly, when Mrs. Bennet hears of Lydia's elopement, she throws a massive temper tantrum and takes to her bed, moaning and weeping and telling anyone who will listen how this tragedy is a personal affront to her. Yet Austen depicts this colossal meltdown coolly. She writes: "Though her brother and sister were persuaded that there was no real occasion for such a seclusion from the family, they did not attempt to oppose it, for they knew that she had not prudence enough to hold her tongue before the servants" (187). Such understated treatments of dramatic moments in the plot lend a signature air of dry humor to the piece.

Hyperbole- Do characters within the story make gross overstatements to drive home an issue or idea? (15c)

When Catherine de Bourgh arrives at Longbourne in the dead of night with the intention of humiliating and reprimanding Elizabeth, she speaks in wild and exaggerated language of Elizabeth's unsuitable connections and character. She proclaims frantically: "I am no stranger to your sister's infamous elopement. I know it all; that the young man's marrying her, was a patched up business, at the expense of your father and uncle. And is such a girl to be my nephew's sister? Is her husband, is the son of his late father's

steward, to be his brother? Heaven and earth! – Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted?” (233). While Lady Catherine’s outburst is hyperbolic and exaggerated in the extreme (she compares Lizzie and her family with a pollution which will infiltrate and destroy Pemberley), her response draws reader’s attention to the reality of the social strata which informs Darcy’s initial comments about the Bennet family. According to the popular perception and social norms of the day, his interest in Lizzie is highly irregular and inappropriate.

Irony (a- Do you know more about the character than the character himself does at any point in the story (dramatic irony)?

Understatement and hyperbole work together to create verbal irony in Austen’s piece. When Lizzie protests that she is “not a good reader,” a ready ear can catch the subtle humor underscoring her statement. Though she might not yet understand the significance of her own admission, there is plenty of evidence to hand which confirms the claim. She is indeed a terrible “reader” of character, even before she knows it of herself.

Austen favors irony, even going so far as to weave an instance of *dramatic irony*, into the title of her piece: *Pride and Prejudice*. The two vices or flaws witnessed in the title are mirror images of one another. While one seems self-important and the other resentful, both focalize on a character’s obsession with self, appearances, and the respect of others. This being said, Lizzie and Darcy’s very flaws mark them as a fit match for one another.

Austen’s very choice of genre depends heavily on irony. She writes satire: a veiled commentary on societal norms. As a result, her works aim to be simultaneously realistic and analytical. Even as she paints a true picture of her society, she unflinchingly portrays its flaws and foibles. This double purpose layered in the scenes and characters of the story makes the whole work a genius of irony. Yet oftentimes satire can be sharp and mean-spirited, and Austen manages to maintain a mirthful, gracious tone towards even the most ridiculous elements of her society. She portrays them honestly, but gently.

NOTES:

QUESTIONS ABOUT CONTEXT



Who is the author? (18)

Jane Austen was born in 1775 to a poor rector in Steventon, Hampshire. One of eight children, Austen had six brothers and a sister. She and Cassandra were the closest of friends and confidantes throughout their lives. Indeed, almost all that scholars know of Jane they discovered in her letters to Cassandra. They surmise that there were at least 3,000 letters at one time, but Cassandra destroyed all but 160 of these for the sake of Jane's privacy.

Jane and Cassandra both received schooling, first submitting to the tutelage of a Mrs. Ann Crawley in Oxford and then attending boarding school in Reading for a short time. Due to financial and health problems in the family, however, they were brought home in 1786, and from then on Jane never lived anywhere beyond the bounds of her immediate family environment. Though her formal education ceased early on, Jane read widely and developed a knack for writing early. She wrote her first works, *Love and Friendship*, and *A Brief History of England: by a partial, prejudiced, and ignorant historian*, at 14 years old. Within these humorous works, readers can already perceive the marks of the great writer she was to become.

Jane was prolific, writing *Sense and Sensibility* (originally titled *Elinor and Marianne*) and *Pride and Prejudice* (originally titled *First Impressions*) in quick succession. Though she read these early works aloud to her family and her father did try to get *First Impressions* published, Jane did not begin her career as an authoress until after the death of her father in 1805. At this point, the family faced financial trouble, and Austen turned to her pen for a living. With the help of her brother, Henry, Austen soon published *Sense and Sensibility* to great social acclaim. *Pride and Prejudice*, too, sold well. It was published in January of 1813, and by October, publishers were releasing a 2nd edition. *Mansfield Park* was published soon after, and while reviewers ignored it, readers devoured it voraciously. A playwright of the time, Richard Sheridan, famously urged a friend to "buy it immediately, for it is one of the cleverest things I have ever read." Though the public loved her works, Austen preferred to keep a low profile, remaining anonymous in the publications of each book. Yet those in higher circles of society witnessed a few of her public readings. The Prince Regent of England followed Austen's career with interest, keeping a set of her works at each of his residences. He famously requested that she dedicate one of her works to him, and, though she disliked his dissolute lifestyle, she could hardly refuse. Thus, *Emma* is indeed dedicated to the Prince Regent himself.

In 1816, Austen experienced more financial trouble. In addition, her health was failing. She returned to Winchester where she died of Addison's Disease on July 18, 1817. After her death, Austen's siblings, Cassandra and Henry, published a set of her

works, containing *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*. This posthumous publication featured the very first biographical note identifying Austen as the author.

Austen's work was entirely new. Turning away from the sentimental novels of her day, Austen tried instead for a "realistic study of manners" in her works. Lord Byron's future wife Anne Milbanke commented on this innovative purpose, calling *Pride and Prejudice* "a very superior work...the most probable fiction I have ever read." Austen used irony, realism, and satire to great effect, highlighting the foibles and flaws of her own society and all the while maintaining a tone of humor, fun, and goodwill. Lovers of *Pride and Prejudice* may hear echoes of Mr. Bennet's motto as they study Austen's work; for, she habitually "makes sport" for her neighbors and "laughs at them in her turn." Believing firmly that "comedy is the saving grace of life," Austen turned all her skill and insight to good use and led her contemporaries to laugh at themselves in good humored humility. In so doing, she earned a place as one of England's greatest authors.

ESSAY QUESTIONS FOR WRITING ASSIGNMENTS



1. Who is the protagonist of the story? How do the character qualities of the protagonists inform the story's themes? How do you know?
2. According to Jane Austen, what is a good love? What good is love?
3. What does the story's title suggest about the themes of the novel?
4. What do the married couples in the story suggest regarding Austen's ideal of marriage?
5. The story's original title was *First Impressions*. What do impressions have to do with the author's thematic ideas?
6. What is a good man according to this story?
7. Austen paints a vivid portrait of regency era England. How does this setting influence the thematic content of the piece? Would the story be drastically different if one changed the setting?
8. Austen manages to criticize her own society without sounding cynical or cruel. How is this managed? What sorts of literary devices does she employ to achieve this comic satire?

STORY CHARTS



The following pages contain story charts of the type presented in the live seminar *Teaching the Classics*. As is made clear in that seminar, a separate story chart may be constructed for each of the conflicts present in a work of fiction. In particular, the reader's decision as to the *climax* and central themes of the plot structure will depend upon his understanding of the story's central *conflict*. As a result, though the details of setting, characters, exposition, and conclusion may be identical from analysis to analysis, significant variation may be found in those components which appear down the center of the story chart: Conflict, Climax, and Theme. This of course results from the fact that literary interpretation is the work of active minds, and differences of opinion are to be expected – even encouraged!

For the teacher's information, one story chart has been filled in on the next page. In addition, a blank chart is included to allow the teacher to examine different conflicts in the same format.

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen: Story Chart

SETTING

Regency era England(1800's)

In Meryton, a small town in Hertfordshire.

The action of the story unfolds across the whole of England, from Hertfordshire to Kent and from there on to Derbyshire.

The story occurs within the middle class gentry of polite society.

Set in the early adulthood of the main characters.

Lizzie and her sisters seek husbands with single-minded intensity, since life as a spinster is a dubious fate for those who have exceeded their twenties.

CHARACTERS

Elizabeth (Lizzie) Bennet- a witty twenty year old woman who longs for a marriage founded on love and shared interest, rather than mere social convenience.

Mr. Darcy- A wealthy gentleman lacking in manners and smitten with Lizzie against his better judgment.

Mr. Bingley- Mr. Darcy's good natured and malleable friend. He is smitten with Lizzie's sister, Jane. Mr. Wickham- the charming soldier who wins the favor of all Meryton (Lizzie included). He is secretly a scoundrel.

Lady Catherine de Bourgh- Mr. Darcy's unfortunate aunt who hopes to form an alliance between her nephew and her own sickly daughter.

Mr. Collins- obsequious servant of Lady Catherine. Cousin to the Bennet family and due to inherit upon Mr. Bennet's death.

Charlotte Lucas- Elizabeth's best friend. Practically minded and dangerously close to spinsterhood, she decides to settle and set her cap for Mr. Collins.

Climax:

Lizzie sees her own silliness through Darcy's eyes and cries, "Till this moment, I never knew myself." Humbled by this new self-sight, Lizzie finally has a chance at becoming a truly good judge of character. In addition, she begins to feel a new respect and admiration for Mr. Darcy.

Denouement:

Just as Lizzie's heart warms to Mr. Darcy, an event occurs which threatens to prevent their union. Mr. Wickham seduces Lydia and convinces her to elope with him, enmeshing the Bennets in a devastating scandal. Against all odds, Mr Darcy risks his good name and saves the Bennet family, forcing Wickham to marry Lydia after all.

Rising Action:

Later, when Mr. Darcy proposes, Lizzie declares her perceptions of him strongly, only to realize she has been blind all along. He offers her a letter which reveals his own good character and exposes Wickham's villainy. Shocked and appalled, Lizzie finds herself convinced of Darcy's honesty and is forced to revisit her perceptions of both men.

THEME:

Love involves humbling of self to see one's flaws and, in turn, offering the other grace for their imperfections.
Appearance vs. Reality
The importance of mutual respect for a happy union.

Exposition:

Dreaming of a marriage founded on love and respect, Elizabeth finds place as the town beauty and as an excellent judge of character. Yet she judges people too quickly to be accurate in her assertions. Encountering a waspish Mr. Darcy at a ball, she nurses wounded pride and labels him a conceited boor even as she admires the charming Mr. Wickham despite the warnings of her friends.

Conclusion:

When a furious Lady Catherine arrives at Elizabeth's house, unbidden, to dispel the rumors of a union between Miss Bennet and her nephew, Lizzie hopes that Darcy will renew his proposal. Sure enough, he comes to Longbourne with Mr. Bingley. The two couples are engaged. Happy marriages await them both.

PLOT

CONFLICT

Will Elizabeth find happiness in marriage? Man vs. Society; Man vs, Self
Will she become a "good judge of character?" Man vs. Self
Will she attain Mr. Darcy's good opinion? Man vs. Man

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen: Story Chart



