

Pride and Prejudice

By
Jane Austen

Romanticism in literature began in Europe in the late eighteenth century continuing through the middle of the 19th century. This movement emphasized emotions and the imagination. Although Jane Austen wrote during this period, she cannot be compared with the other writers in the romantic period since her novels address none of the romantic ideologies regarding nature or the imagination. Her novels deal with real people in realistic circumstances. Her prose was also more real and less flowery, and in several of her novels she even makes fun of the writers of her time.

Read a short biography of Jane Austen on the Internet before you begin reading the novel.

Pride and Prejudice is arguably her most famous novel. Her heroine, Elizabeth Bennet is loved for her intelligence, wit, and independence. Elizabeth's and her sister Jane's love affairs end successfully in spite of a neurotic mother, undisciplined sisters, and a disengaged father.

The ironic tone of the novel is set by the opening sentence: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."

List of Characters

Elizabeth Bennet—The proud and witty heroine of the story.

Fitzwilliam Darcy—The rich and prideful man who falls in love with Elizabeth

Mr. Bennet—The dry and somewhat negligent father of Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty, and Lydia

Mrs. Bennet—The simple, silly mother of Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty, and Lydia

Jane Bennet—The beautiful, gentle eldest daughter of the Bennets

Mary Bennet—The frivolous and pompous third daughter

Lydia Bennet—The spoiled, flighty youngest daughter

Catherine (Kitty) Bennet - Similar to her sister Lydia, but sullen and moody

George Wickham—The handsome, unprincipled officer who has a grudge against Darcy

Charles Bingley—Darcy's close friend who falls in love with Jane

Caroline Bingley—Charles' cold and haughty sister who wants to become Mrs. Darcy

Colonel Fitzwilliam—Darcy's mild-mannered cousin. He is attracted to Elizabeth

Lady Catherine de Bourgh—Darcy’s pretentious, meddling aunt

Miss de Bourgh—Lady Catherine’s unremarkable daughter

Mr. Collins—Mr. Bennet’s cousin who will inherit Longbourn after Mr. Bennet’s death

Georgiana Darcy—Darcy’s timid younger sister

Sir William and Lady Lucas—The Bennets’ neighbors. Parents of Charlotte

Charlotte Lucas—Elizabeth’s intelligent friend who marries Mr. Collins for security, much to Elizabeth’s dismay

Mr. and Mrs. Hurst—Bingley’s proud sister and his lazy brother-in-law

Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner—Mrs. Bennet’s well-educated and intelligent brother and her sister-in-law

Mrs. Hill—The Bennet’s housekeeper

Read Chapters 1-9

Discussion:

1. Why is Mrs. Bennet so concerned that Mr. Bennet visit Mr. Bingley as quickly as possible?
2. Compare Jane and Elizabeth. How are they alike? How do they differ?
3. What evidences of pride and prejudice have you seen thus far in the novel?
4. Darcy claims he does not know more than half-a-dozen accomplished women. How do Miss Bingley and Darcy describe an accomplished woman? What is Elizabeth’s reaction to this?
5. How would an accomplished woman be described today? What do you think is a mark of accomplishment?

Writing assignment: The original title of the book was *First Impressions*. Write your first impression of each of the main characters.

Read Chapters 10-20

Discussion:

1. What weaknesses does Darcy say expose “a strong understanding to ridicule?” What defect do Darcy and Elizabeth say the other has?
2. In these chapters we are introduced to one of Austen’s most comical characters – the pompous Mr. Collins as well as the villain of the piece – the self-absorbed Mr. Wickham. What are your first impressions of these two characters?
3. Look up the terms *entailment* and *primogeniture*. Why was this practiced? Is it still practiced today?
4. What is the purpose of Mr. Collins visit?
5. What do you think is indicated by the reaction of Mr. Wickham and Mr. Darcy upon meeting?
6. How does Miss Bingley’s account of Wickham differ from his account? Why is it likely that

Elizabeth will not believe her?

7. What happens to humiliate Elizabeth at the ball?

Writing Assignment: Research Romanticism and write a paragraph that describes the main points.

Read Chapters 21-30

Discussion:

1. What are Charlotte's reasons for accepting Mr. Collins? How does Elizabeth feel about Charlotte's decision? Do you agree with her?
2. Do you think Charlotte has made a good decision?
3. What is your first impression of Lady Catherine?
4. How does Elizabeth describe her parents' method of educating their daughters? What were the results? How does this compare to the way your parents are educating you?
5. Why is it reasonable that even though Colonel Fitzwilliam and Elizabeth may be attracted to each other, he will not be proposing to her?

Writing assignment: Write a paper discussing the importance of marriage in Jane Austen's time comparing it to today.

Read Chapters 31-38

Discussion:

1. How is Mr. Darcy now embarrassed by his family?
2. What is foreshadowed by Mr. Darcy saying, "*You* cannot have a right to such very strong local attachment. *You* cannot have been always at Longbourn?"
3. What brings on Elizabeth's headache?
4. Darcy's proposal to Elizabeth is the turning point of the novel. What do you expect Elizabeth's answer to be?
5. How does Elizabeth respond to Mr. Darcy's proposal? Do you think she is too harsh?
6. What did Mr. Darcy say to make Elizabeth declare, "I might as well inquire why with so evident a design of offending and insulting me, you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character?"
7. What two things does Elizabeth accuse Mr. Darcy of?
- 8 How do they part?
9. How does Elizabeth's feelings change after reading Mr. Darcy's letter?

Writing assignment: Look back at the paper you wrote about your first impressions of the main characters. Write a paper describing how your impressions have changed.

Read Chapters 39-50

Discussion:

- 1 What are the reasons Elizabeth gives for not exposing Wickham? Do you agree with her?
2. How does Caroline Bingley try to insult Elizabeth? What does she end up doing?
3. How does Darcy react to this family scandal?
4. How do Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Bennet react to the scandal?
5. Why did Wickham really leave Meryton with Lydia?

6. What does Mr. Collins say about what should be done to Lydia?
7. Why are Jane and Elizabeth shocked when Mr. Gardiner tells them about the intended marriage?

Writing assignment: Do you think that class still plays a part in today's society? Why or why not? Write a paragraph stating your opinion.

Read Chapters 51-61

Discussion:

1. What does Lady Catherine try to get Elizabeth to promise?
2. In what way does Mr. Darcy show how much he loves Elizabeth?
Have you ever experienced a change in a first impression you had of someone?
3. What does Elizabeth admit to her father after Darcy's proposal?
4. How does Mr. Bennet's concern differ from his wife's?
5. Compare the three marriages in the book: Lydia and Wickham, Jane and Bingley, Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy.
6. Are you satisfied with the ending of the book? Would you recommend it to someone else?

Writing Assignment: Write an essay discussing how each of the main characters exhibit both pride and prejudice.

Optional Activities

1. In literature, *round* characters are characters that develop and change throughout the story while *flat* characters are ones that remain the same. Make a chart showing which characters are round and which are flat in *Pride and Prejudice*.
2. The underlying message or idea about life or the human condition in a work of literature is called the **theme**. The theme will not be explicitly stated, but rather implied. Some common themes are love, hate, noble sacrifice, and coming of age. There may be more than one theme. What are some major themes found in *Pride and Prejudice*?
3. Show the route that Elizabeth traveled on a map.
4. If possible, watch two or more film adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*. Write an essay comparing the films – 1940, starring Greer Garson; 1995, A&E mini-series starring Jennifer Ehle; 2005, starring Keira Knightly.
5. Enjoy reading Jane Austen's other novels:
Sense and Sensibility, published 1811
Mansfield Park, published 1813
Emma, published 1816
Persuasion, published 1818
Northanger Abbey, published 1818.

Answers

Chapters 1-9

1. She wants him to be among the first to visit their new neighbor, Mr. Bingley. He is an eligible bachelor and she has five unmarried daughters.
2. While both girls are very pretty, Jane is considered the belle of the family. Both girls are intelligent, but Elizabeth has the quickest wit. Jane is quiet and reserved. She only sees good in others. Elizabeth looks at the world through a more critical lens but maintains a good sense of humor. Jane is humble, but Elizabeth tends to think more highly of herself.
3. Examples should include Mrs. Bennet's prejudice against Mr. Darcy because she thinks he is disagreeable, Mr. Bingley's sisters appear to be very haughty, Mr. Darcy shows pride when he remarks that Lizzy is not handsome enough for him, Elizabeth forms a prejudice against Mr. Darcy because she thinks he is too proud, etc.
4. "A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages...she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions" and she must be well-read. Elizabeth says she is no longer surprised that he only knows so few accomplished women. She now wonders that he knows any at all.
5. Answers will vary.

Chapters 10-20

1. He states that vanity and pride are the two greatest weaknesses in any individual. Elizabeth says Darcy's defect is to hate everybody. Darcy countermands with "and yours is a willful ploy to misunderstand them."
2. Answers will vary.
3. Research
4. Having established himself, he intends to marry. He wants to reconcile with the Longbourn family and has decided to atone for his inheriting their father's estate by marrying one of the daughters.
5. It would appear they have met before. Their meeting is very cold and stiff, so it can be assumed there is ill-feelings between them.
6. She confirms that Wickham is the son of the late Mr. Darcy's steward, but she warns Elizabeth not to believe all that he told her. She says that it is Mr. Darcy who was ill-used although she doesn't know the particulars, and that Mr. Darcy has always treated Wickham kindly. Elizabeth does not believe Miss Bingley because she is blinded by her prejudice against Mr. Darcy, and Miss Bingley has always shown herself to be spiteful and jealous of Elizabeth.
7. First, Mr. Collins accosts Mr. Darcy without waiting to be introduced. Elizabeth can see that Mr. Darcy holds him in contempt. Next, at dinner, Mrs. Bennet loudly declares how happy she is that Jane and Bingley are going to be a match even though they have just met. When Elizabeth tries to quiet her because Mr. Darcy is nearby and can overhear her conversation, Mrs. Bennet then loudly insults Mr. Darcy. Finally, her sister Mary makes a spectacle of herself while publicly performing.

Chapters 21-30

1. "I am not romantic, you know; I never was. I ask only a comfortable home – and considering Mr. Collins's character, connections and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair as most people can boast on entering the marriage state."

Elizabeth finds it hard to accept. "Charlotte the wife of Mr. Collins was a most humiliating picture!" She does not believe it at first, but later she can only dwell on the fact that Charlotte will someday be the mistress of Longbourn. She is also distressed because she cannot believe that Charlotte will be happy.

2. Answers will vary.

3. She is a snob who has an opinion on everything. She loves telling people what is best for them and is not used to anyone standing up to her.

4. The daughters never had a governess as was customary at that time. "Those that wanted to learn were encouraged to read and had all the masters that were necessary. Those who chose to be idle, certainly, might." While this might seem like a reasonable way to handle their daughters' education, much of the problems with the younger girls' characters can be traced to this decision.

5. He is a younger son and, thus, must marry someone with money.

Chapters 31-38

1. Lady Catherine exhibits her ill-breeding by proclaiming that Elizabeth can use the piano in the governess's rooms where she will not be in the way.

2. He is planning to propose which would require Elizabeth moving away from her family.

3. She is upset when Colonel Fitzwilliam tells her that Mr. Darcy has admitted to keeping Bingley from entering into an improper marriage. He does not know that this was to Elizabeth's beloved sister Jane.

4. Answers will vary.

5. Elizabeth is surprised at Mr. Darcy's proposal. She at first refuses him politely, but when he presses her for her reasons, her anger grows, and she gives him the biggest insult possible by telling him that he behaved "ungentlemanly."

6. (Against his will) "In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed."

(against his reason) 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 warmth.

(against his character) He concluded with representing to her the strength of that attachment which in spite of all his endeavours, he had found impossible to conquer.

7. She accuses him of ruining Jane's chances for happiness and for treating Wickham unfairly.

8. Darcy is embarrassed, and Elizabeth is furious.

9. After re-reading Darcy's letter, Elizabeth begins to see that Darcy has acted honorably and acknowledges that Mr. Wickham was disloyal. She realizes that her own pride and her prejudice towards Darcy have made her judge him wrongly.

Chapters 39-50

1. Mr. Darcy has not given her permission to share the news. Also, the news would embarrass his sister if made public. Finally, the negative feelings toward Mr. Darcy by the people of Meryton are so strong that to correct them "would be the death of half of the good people of Meryton."

2. She hints that the Bennet family must be very hurt by the militia's decision to leave their town. She is not aware of Wickham and Georgina's past relationship, so she inadvertently hurts Darcy and Georgina by this thin reference to Wickham.

3. Darcy shares a sense of guilt with Elizabeth. Darcy feels his inaction regarding Wickham earlier has caused the predicament. Elizabeth regrets not revealing Wickham's true character.
4. The Bennet parents once again show their inadequacy as parents; Mrs. Bennet because of her stupidity and Mr. Bennet because of his refusal to take responsibility for his children.
5. He had a trail of debts and she was infatuated with him. He decided to turn a bad situation to his advantage.
6. He advises Mr. Bennet "to throw off your unworthy child and leave her to reap the fruits of her heinous offence." Once again, Mr. Collins shows how small and petty he is. He gloats about not getting involved with such a family. He also informs Lady de Bourgh of the scandal, hoping to injure Elizabeth and Darcy.
7. They had not believed that Wickham would marry Lydia. They are also shocked to think of how much a sacrifice their uncle was making in bribing Wickham to marry Lydia.

Chapters 51-61

1. Lady Catherine is the last of the many obstacles facing the romance between Darcy and Elizabeth. Elizabeth's encounter with Lady Catherine shows her in the best light by exhibiting her finest qualities - intelligence, wit, and courage; while Lady Catherine is as always, an unrefined snob as she demands that Elizabeth refuse Darcy if he proposes.
2. After being thanked by Elizabeth for his kindness to Lydia, Darcy replies, "If you *will* thank me, let it be for yourself alone. That the wish of giving happiness to you might add force to the other inducements which led me on, I shall not attempt to deny. But your *family* owe me nothing. Much as I respect them, I believe I thought only of you."
3. She tells him the truth about Darcy's settlement in the Lydia and Wickham affair and how he resolved it.
4. Lydia and Wickham's marriage is based on selfishness and fraud. They have learned nothing and probably will not change. The marriage does not seem destined to be a happy one. Jane and Bingley's marriage is based on unselfish love. They will be happy but will probably be taken advantage of because they are incapable of thinking ill of anyone. Elizabeth and Darcy's marriage is based on love and respect. They will have the most successful marriage because they are both strong, intelligent, and well-matched.
5. Answers will vary.