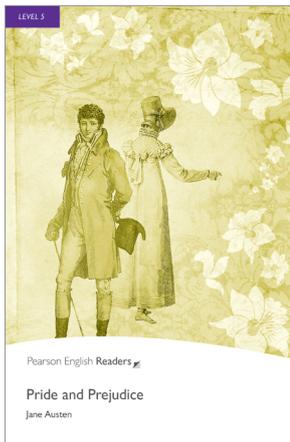


# Pride and Prejudice

Jane Austen



## About the author

Jane Austen is universally recognised as one of England's greatest novelists. Born in 1775 in the Hampshire countryside, she was the seventh child in a family of eight. Her father, George Austen, was a clergyman; the family was middle class and comfortably off. Austen started writing as a young teenager; even at that age her works were incisive and elegantly expressed.

Jane Austen's family was lively and affectionate. Like most country people of that time, the family lived a fairly restricted social life, since travel was difficult. Austen received several proposals of marriage. However, she never married, and lived an uneventful life, happy to remain in the family home.

Her works have become recognised as some of the first to deal with social life in a new way. An important commentator, Lionel Trilling, wrote: 'It was Jane Austen who first represented the specifically modern personality and the culture in which it had its being. Never before had the moral life been shown as she shows it to be, never before had it been conceived to be so complex and difficult and exhausting ... She is the first to be aware of the Terror which rules our moral situation, the ubiquitous anonymous judgment to which we respond ...'

Spence, one of her biographers, says of her 'She takes the most ordinary, insignificant bits of information and effortlessly enlivens them with wit and fresh turns of phrase', and many have seen this as the main appeal of her work.

Austen wrote six major novels. *Sense and Sensibility* was published in 1811, *Pride and Prejudice* in 1813, *Mansfield Park* in 1814, *Emma* in 1816. *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* were published after her death. The novels

were popular. As many women novelists in a time where novel writing was not quite respectable, she published her novels anonymously. This kept her excluded from literary circles.

Jane Austen died relatively young of illness in 1817 at the age of forty-one.

## Dramatis Personae

**Mr and Mrs Bennet** Well-off but not wealthy, have five daughters: Jane, Elizabeth (Lizzy), Mary, Catherine (Kitty) and Lydia.

**Mr Bingley** A rich young man who at the beginning of the story has just moved into the area where the Bennets live.

**Mr Darcy** A friend of Mr Bingley's. Not a very warm person on first acquaintance, he will turn out not to be what he appears to be.

**Mr Wickham** A charming military officer, stationed near the Bennets' house. He will turn out to be an immoral confidence trickster.

**Sir William Lucas**, Lady Lucas and their children, including Charlotte, Elizabeth's friend, are neighbours of the Bennets. Although they are titled they are not very wealthy.

**Mr Collins** A cousin of Mr Bennet's whom he has never met before our story begins.

**Mr and Mrs Gardiner** The aunt and uncle of Elizabeth and her sisters. They live close by.

**Lady Catherine De Bourgh** Mr Darcy's wealthy aunt and Mr Collins' patroness. She is a rude and arrogant lady.

## Summary

Austen's now classic novel examines the trials and tribulations of a young woman in a wealthy eighteenth century milieu.

**Chapter 1 *The Bennets*** Mr and Mrs Bennet have five daughters. Mrs Bennet is eager to marry them off and is very unsubtle about it. When she sees a new neighbour in the area, a rich young man named Bingley, she hopes he will end up marrying one of her girls.

**Chapter 2 *New neighbours at Netherfield*** Mr Bennet has formally visited Mr Bingley and shortly afterwards, all the daughters meet Bingley and his friend Mr Darcy at a ball. Darcy is rude to Elizabeth.

**Chapter 3 *Jane gains an admirer*** Jane Bennet and Mr Bingley seem to be falling in love. Mr Darcy is

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becoming interested in Elizabeth. Jane is invited to dinner with the Bingleys. She falls ill while she is there. Elizabeth goes to join her. Bingley's family express the opinion that a gentleman could never marry Jane, because of her 'inferior' relations on her mother's side.

**Chapter 4 Mr Collins** Mr Collins, a cousin of Mr Bennet's and legal heir to all his wealth, comes to visit. He intends to marry one of the daughters, though he is dull and rude. He chooses Elizabeth.

**Chapter 5 Mr Wickham** On a visit to the local town, the daughters make the acquaintance of Mr Wickham, an army officer. Mr Darcy and Mr Wickham are obviously on extremely bad terms. Wickham later explains to Elizabeth that this is because Darcy had treated him very dishonourably in the past.

**Chapter 6 The ball at Netherfield** At the ball, Mr Collins insists on dancing with Elizabeth. Wickham is absent. Miss Bingley warns Elizabeth that Wickham is lying about Darcy, but since she presents his fault as naturally due to his 'inferior' family, Elizabeth does not believe her and continues to trust Wickham.

**Chapter 7 Mr Collins makes a proposal** Mr Collins asks Elizabeth to marry him. She refuses. Her mother is very angry but Mr Bennet supports Elizabeth's decision.

**Chapter 8 Netherfield is empty** Jane receives a letter from Mr Bingley's sister, saying that they are leaving at once for London and will not be back for a long time. The letter also suggests that Bingley is likely to marry Darcy's sister and not Jane Bennet. Elizabeth assumes this is because of the Bennet's inferior social rank.

**Chapter 9 Mr Collins makes another proposal** Mr Collins wastes no time in making another proposal of marriage, this time to Charlotte Lucas, who accepts.

**Chapter 10 Jane goes to London** Jane, worried about Bingley's feelings, heads for London, but the Bingleys, who are in London, seem to be ignoring her.

**Chapter 11 Elizabeth visits Hunsford** Elizabeth goes to visit Charlotte at her house.

**Chapter 12 Lady Catherine de Bourgh** Elizabeth is invited to dinner at the home of Darcy's aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, a grand and arrogant lady.

**Chapter 13 Visitors to Rosings** Elizabeth meets Mr Darcy. He appears to be interested in her, but she thinks nothing of it.

**Chapter 14 Mr Darcy** Elizabeth learns that it was Darcy who stopped Bingley from marrying Jane. She is angry and then amazed when Darcy asks her to marry him. She refuses rudely.

**Chapter 15 Elizabeth receives a letter** Darcy writes to Elizabeth to explain why he stopped Bingley marrying Jane, and to give his version of his conflict with Wickham.

**Chapter 16 Elizabeth and Jane return home** Elizabeth tells Jane about Darcy.

**Chapter 17 The regiment leaves Meryton** After Wickham's regiment has left the region for Brighton, Lydia the youngest Bennet, who is sixteen years old, is invited to stay in Brighton with friends.

**Chapter 18 Pemberley** Elizabeth accidentally meets Darcy on her travels. He is charming and many people tell her what a nice gentleman he is.

**Chapter 19 The Bingleys** The Bingleys come to stay with Darcy. It seems Darcy is still in love with Elizabeth.

**Chapter 20 Lydia and Wickham** Elizabeth learns that sixteen year old Lydia has run off with Wickham, and may not even have got married to him. Darcy shows sympathy towards Elizabeth.

**Chapter 21 Mr Gardiner goes to London** Mr Gardiner and Mr Bennet go to London to try to find the missing couple.

**Chapter 22 Mr Bennet returns** Mr Collins writes to say it would be better if Lydia were dead, and that he is very glad he did not marry into such a family.

**Chapter 23 Lydia and Wickham** The couple has been found, and Wickham agrees to marry Lydia in return for a large sum of money. Elizabeth and her father believe that Mr Gardiner has given the money.

**Chapter 24 Mr Bennet agrees to their marriage** Lydia is married. Elizabeth discovers that it is Darcy who secretly paid Mr Wickham the money necessary.

**Chapter 25 Return to Netherfield** Mr Bingley and Mr Darcy come back to the neighbourhood. Bingley, encouraged by Darcy, proposed to Jane, who willingly accepts.

**Chapter 26 Lady Catherine visits Longbourne** Lady Catherine, Darcy's aunt visits. She demands to know if Elizabeth is engaged to Darcy and asks her to promise never to accept such a proposal. Elizabeth, insulted, refuses.

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**Chapter 27 Elizabeth and Mr Darcy** Darcy proposes to Elizabeth and she accepts. Mr Bennet is amazed, but gives his permission.

**Chapter 28 The End** Jane and Elizabeth are married and the story ends.

### Background and themes

Jane Austen's works are satirical comedies about the middle and upper-middle classes. The plots are variations on a standard theme: a young woman's courtship and eventual marriage. By the end of every one of Austen's novels the heroine has found a husband. The world she describes is small. In one letter Austen compared herself to a painter of miniatures: 'the little bit of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush ...' But within this narrow focus Jane explores an important and universal theme: the adjustments that a person must make to family and society.

For a young upper middle-class woman of this period, marriage was the surest route to independence and freedom. Marriage to a wealthy man of good birth was the most desirable position for a woman. Unmarried women living in their parents' house (as Jane Austen was) were considered as second class citizens. Social life, for these upper middle classes, was ruled by a complex structure of etiquette – formal visiting, leaving of visiting cards, letter writing and so on. It is a world that Jane Austen looks at sympathetically, but with a little gentle mockery in her tone.

### Discussion activities

#### Activities before reading the book

##### 1 Memory game: Jane Austen

Read the information about Jane Austen at the front of *Pride and Prejudice* or find information elsewhere. Give each student in the class a fact about her, written on a slip of paper. Ask students to memorise their 'fact' and then to put the slip of paper away. Students then have ten minutes to collect as many facts as possible. They do this by asking each other what their 'facts' are. They then return to their seats and write down all the facts they have memorised. The winner is the person who has listed the greatest number of correct facts.

##### 2 Discuss: The book cover

Get the students to look at the book cover. Ask them to guess which of the following events or themes occur in the book. Ask them why they think this.

- bloody murders
- formal ballroom dancing

- falling in love
- the appearance of ghosts
- duelling with pistols
- the arrival of aliens from another planet
- problems of social inferiority

Ask them to further consider the cover. Guide them with the following questions:

*What effect do the flowers have?*

*How are the man and woman dressed?*

*How rich are they? Do they have servants?*

*Must they be English or would people from other countries be dressed the same?*

*What century did they live in?*

### Chapters 1–4

#### After reading

##### 3 Understand and predict:

In small groups, students discuss the following questions:

- a Who are the following characters and what is their relationship to each other? Mr Bennet, Mrs Bennet, Jane, Elizabeth, Mr Bingley, Mr Darcy
- b Say what you have learnt so far about the characters of these six people.
- c How does Bingley show his feelings about Jane? How does she show her feelings about him? What is the next step they could take to show they are interested in each other? Who do you think will take the initiative?

##### 4 Discuss: Courtship

Put students in groups to discuss the following questions.

*The young ladies of the Bennet family are obviously extremely concerned with finding a husband. Are young women today just as concerned, or has life changed completely?*

*What are the main differences in the rules of courtship then and now?*

##### 5 Write: Advice

Ask your students to write five pieces of advice on social rules for a modern young woman suddenly transported into Elizabeth Bennet's time and situation. For example, they should not talk to people to whom they have not yet been introduced.

##### 6 Write and discuss: Advice for Elizabeth

Ask your students to imagine that Elizabeth Bennet has travelled through time and arrived in the modern day. Each student must write three rules for social relations between men and women today. Then get the students together in pairs, then in groups of four, to look at the rules. If you wish you can write the most interesting ones on the blackboard and get the class to choose the five most important rules.

##### 7 Research and discuss: Inheritance and equality

According to the law mentioned in the novel, Mr Bennet's wealth could only be inherited by a male relative, and his daughter's would get little. Ask your students to find out something about the history of

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women's property laws in Britain (in particular the Married Women's Property Act of 1870), and about other laws bringing equal rights for women and men.

### Chapters 6–7

#### After reading

##### 8 Discuss and predict:

Get students in small groups to guess what Mr Collins will do, now he has been refused by Elizabeth. Guide them with these questions:

*What kind of man is Mr Collins?*

*What kind of wife is he looking for? Why did he choose Elizabeth?*

*Would he have been happy with Elizabeth? Why (not)?*

*Would Elizabeth have been happy with him? Why (not)?*

*How will he react now? Will he seek revenge? Will he die of a broken heart? What else could he do?*

Get them to report back their ideas to the whole group.

- 9 **Write and role play:** Ask students to work in pairs and imagine a conversation between Elizabeth and Jane, after Mr Collins' proposal, but before Elizabeth has spoken to her father. Elizabeth is nervous about what her father's reaction will be. Students should write the conversation, and then act it out in front of the group.

### Chapters 8–10

#### After reading

##### 10 Discuss and predict:

In small groups, students discuss the following questions:

*In what ways are Jane and Elizabeth different from each other? In what ways are they similar?*

*Why do you think Bingley has decided to leave the region?*

*What difficulties might have come up over the prospect of Bingley choosing Jane Bennet as his future wife?*

##### 11 Write: A letter

Give your students the following instructions.

*You are a servant in the Bennet household. You have seen all that happened during the visit of Mr Collins, what was said between the Bennets, and the surprise departure of Mr Bingley. Write a letter to your sister or brother in another town to tell all this news. Imagine what your own opinion is and give it in the letter.*

##### 12 Vocabulary:

Ask your students to use a dictionary.

- a Which of these adjectives do they think could reasonably be applied to Mrs Bennet?  
Fashionable, narrow-minded, melodramatic, gracious, anxious, adventurous, garrulous
- b Which of these adjectives do they think could reasonably be applied to Mr Bennet?  
Energetic, witty, unpredictable, irresponsible, anxious, depressive, clever

### Chapters 11–16

#### After reading

##### 13 Understanding and role play:

Ask students the following questions:

*Elizabeth receives the surprise of her life. What happens and why is she so surprised?*

When you have elicited their answers, put students in pairs. Ask them to imagine that Elizabeth tells Jane what has happened and what her feelings are. Ask students to role play this conversation.

##### 14 Role play: Daughters and marriage

Lady Catherine suggests that Mr Bennet is not doing his duty as a father, for example because he allows all five of his daughters to go out to dances together, thus not helping their chances of marriage.

Ask students to prepare a role play. Give them these instructions.

*You are two friends of the Bennets. One of you is very critical of Mr Bennet because of his lack of interest in marrying his daughters off. The other one defends Mr Bennet's attitudes. Prepare arguments and then act out a discussion between the two friends.*

### Chapters 17–22

#### After reading

##### 15 Understand and predict:

Ask students to answer the following questions in pairs

- a *What happens at Pemberley and why is Elizabeth so surprised and embarrassed?*
- b *In what way have Darcy and Elizabeth changed since they last met?*
- c *Elizabeth tells Darcy that Lydia has run away with Wickham. What do you think will happen as a result? Will Darcy be disgusted with the Bennet family or will he try to help Elizabeth?*
- d *What do you think Elizabeth believes?*

##### 16 Write: A letter

Mr Collins' letter about Lydia may seem harsh. Imagine that Mr Bennet writes a reply. Write the letter. Be tactful.

##### 17 Discuss: Difficult marriages

Elizabeth feels there are disadvantages for the children of a marriage like her father's. Ask students to discuss in pairs. Guide them with the following questions.

- What disadvantages is Elizabeth talking about?
- How are children affected by difficult marriages?
- Is it acceptable today to stay in a marriage 'just for the sake of the children'? Give arguments for and against.

### Chapters 23–25

#### After reading

##### 18 Write: A love letter

Get your students to imagine that Elizabeth, armed with her new knowledge and appreciation of Mr Darcy, has written him a love letter. Of course she will never send him the letter, since that would not

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be socially acceptable, but she felt she must express herself. Ask the students to write the letter. Those who wish can read their letter out to the class.

- 19 Predict:** The story is nearing its end. Get the students to guess what happens next. Guide them with these questions.

*Will the story have a happy end? Why do you think so?  
What will happen? Think of two different possible endings to the story.*

### Chapters 26–28

#### After reading

##### 20 Discuss: Vocabulary

In pairs, students choose three adjectives from the list below that best describe: Elizabeth, Jane, Darcy, Lydia, Wickham, and Mrs Bennet

selfish vulgar unreliable foolish  
critical gentle principled good-natured  
superficial charming arrogant shrewd  
lively greedy immoral

Ask students to explain why they chose these adjectives.

#### After reading

- 21 Acting:** Put students in pairs. Ask them to choose the scene in the book they find the most dramatic and to act it out. Tell them to try and really act to imagine that they are these characters. When students have finished, the whole class votes for the most convincing pair.

##### 22 Discuss: Love marriages and arranged marriages

Ask the students to think, in pairs, about the marriages of Charlotte Lucas and Mr Collins, of Elizabeth and Darcy and of Lydia and Wickham. Guide them with the following questions

*What were the main reasons for each marriage?  
How much choice did the women have?  
What kind of marriages do you think Elizabeth, Jane and Lydia will have?*

*In some families, marriages are still arranged by the parents. What is your opinion of this custom?*

*People do not marry as much as they used to. Do you think marriage is in the process of disappearing? Find three arguments for this point of view and three arguments against it.*

When they have finished ask the students to share the arguments they found with the rest of the class.

##### 23 Research and discuss: Servants

Ask your students how servants are presented in Austen's book. What importance do their lives have? Ask them at home to find out about the numbers, and the lives of servants in Britain when Austen was alive. Why do they think Austen chooses to portray servants in this way?

##### 24 Research and present: The Regency period

Ask your students to research at home or on the Internet. Guide them with the following questions: *When was the Regency period? Why did it have this name?*

*What was Regency furniture like? Regency dress? Regency architecture? Bring in a picture of one of these and present it to the class.*

*Do you like this style? Who do you know who might like it?*

##### 25 Research and Discuss: Film

Ask students to find out at home from books or from the Internet about the films made of Austen's books. (*Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, *Sense and Sensibility* ...) If you can show them extracts this will be even more effective. Then put them in small groups to discuss. Guide them with these questions.

*Why are these films popular in your opinion?*

*Do you enjoy them? If not, which of your relatives might enjoy them?*

*Do you think they are 'typically British'?*

*Are there films about other countries which are seen as 'typical'?*

##### 26 Write: A cinema trailer

Explain to students how cinema trailers are often written (a few short dramatic extracts of dialogue and a dramatic voiceover). If possible show them an example. Get students to write, in pairs, a cinema trailer for the film *Pride and Prejudice* and to act it out in front of the other students.

##### 27 Research and discuss: Modern versions

Two modern films, *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Bride and Prejudice* (directed by Gurinder Chadha), use the story of *Pride and Prejudice*. Ask students to find out at home what the main differences were and whether the films were successful. Then ask them to discuss whether they can think up a new film version.

##### 28 Discuss: Popular music

Ask your students (perhaps at home) to choose one or two of the most dramatic episodes in the book and choose a popular song which might accompany this scene in the film. In class, they should justify their choice.

##### 29 Research and discuss: History and art

*Pride and Prejudice* was published in 1813. Ask your students to find out at home about other events around this time (1800–1820). Ask them to summarise in class what they have found out about

- the Napoleonic wars
- the abolition of the slave trade in 1807
- the Luddite revolt in 1811.

Organise a debate, asking some of the students to prepare criticism of Jane Austen for not writing about important events in her time, and others to defend her, arguing that this is not the role of an artist.