

# One Book, One Batavia 2013

## *Meet Jane Austen by Abby Wilson*

Born December 16, 1776, Jane Austen was raised in a middle class family by a father who was the rector of an Anglican parish and a stay-at-home mother. She was one of six children. From the age of twelve, Austen wrote poems, stories, and plays for her family and for her own enjoyment. *Pride and Prejudice* was written when she was 21 years old. Most of her novels parallel her life.

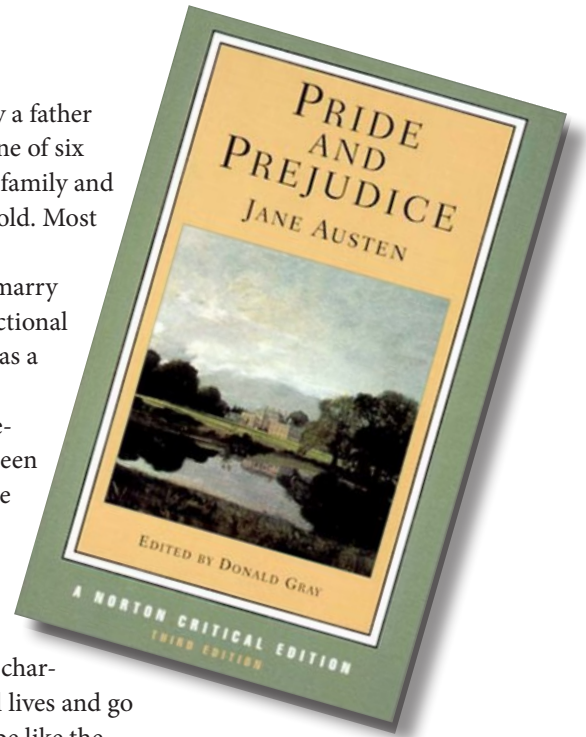
Austen's stories were set in her own time period. Women were expected to marry well, and etiquette was extremely important. Both the real-life Austen and the fictional Bennet families would attend dances to socialize and meet gentlemen. Austen was a good dancer, according to her partners.

Both the Bennet sisters and Jane Austen had strong feminist views. They believed that women did not have to depend on a man for happiness. This can be seen through Elizabeth's reaction to Mr. Collins's marriage proposal. Elizabeth set aside her family's entitlement because she did not want to marry him. Similar to her character, Jane Austen denied a marriage proposal from a wealthy man named Harris. Neither woman was concerned about social climbing, although their mothers were certainly desperate about this issue.

Jane Austen and her sister, Cassandra, were exceptionally close, as were her characters Jane and Elizabeth Bennet. Both sets of girls would talk about their social lives and go on outings with one another. In both cases, the younger sisters really aspired to be like the older ones when they grew up. Jane Austen died on July 18, 1817, with her sister by her side.

### Works Cited

Howard, Tom. *Austen Country*. London: The Caxton Publishing Group, 2000. Print.  
Ray, Joan. *Jane Austen For Dummies*. Indianapolis: Wiley Publishing Inc, 2006. Print.



## Characters

**Mr. Darcy** – He is very intense, rich, and proud. Initially, he is also rude and self-centered, but readers discover another side.

**Mr. Bingley** – Wealthy and best friends with Mr. Darcy, he feels a strong attraction to Jane Bennet. He does not take charge of his own life decisions, yet he is a happy-go-lucky man.

**Mr. Wickham** - A possible husband to one of the Bennet girls, his looks may be deceiving.

**Mr. Collins** - He is the cousin to the Bennet family and heir to the family fortune. He is a man who believes himself great even though he is not.

**Mr. Bennet** - He is a very quiet man who prefers to be left alone to be in his library. Throughout the story, Mr. Bennet seems to be almost absent from the family happenings.

**Mrs. Bennet** - She is a foolish woman and believes that the best things in society come with money.

**Elizabeth Bennet** - The second oldest Bennet daughter, Elizabeth is the polar opposite of Jane and Mrs. Bennet. Elizabeth makes judgements of people based on first impressions and hearsay.

**Jane Bennet** - Jane is very similar to Mr. Bingley in that everyone enjoys her company and thinks her to be extremely pleasant. She is also very beautiful and is defined in society by her looks.

**Mary Bennet** - The classic middle child, Mary tries everything from music to knitting to please her parents, but she is always overlooked.

**Catherine Bennet** - Kitty follows Lydia around, and while she is older, she seems younger. Kitty is not as wild as Lydia, but she is just as enchanted by the idea of marriage.

**Lydia Bennet** - Lydia is enamored with the idea of marriage, especially to a military man.

**Lady Catherine de Bourgh** - Lady Catherine is a wealthy woman, who believes her wealth gives her the ability to look down on people of lower social standing.

**Charlotte Collins** - She is the best friend of Elizabeth Bennet, even though she is much older. One of her main concerns is the fact that she is twenty-seven years old and still not betrothed.

# Discussion Questions

## Book 1

1. What are your first impressions of the Bennet family?
2. Why do you believe characters conceal their affections for one another?
3. How does the relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet affect their daughters' views on marriage?
4. What aspects of higher class do Mr. Bingley and Miss Bingley represent?
5. Do you believe Wickham's accusations of Mr. Darcy? Does Elizabeth believe Wickham?

## Book 2

1. How is the relationship between Mr. Collins and Lady Catherine mutually beneficial?
2. In what ways does Mr. Darcy's proposal illustrate the misconceptions he and Elizabeth have about each other?
3. Do you think Mr. Darcy, as a friend of Mr. Bingley, was justified in separating him from Jane Bennet? Was he overstepping his boundaries?
4. What does Darcy's choice to write Elizabeth a letter reveal about his character?

5. What is Colonel Fitzwilliam's purpose as a character throughout this section?
6. How does Elizabeth's friendship with Charlotte change throughout this section?

## Book 3

1. Do you think Elizabeth subconsciously wanted to run into Darcy at Pemberley? Why or why not?
2. What factors contribute to Darcy's change in demeanor from Book 2 to Book 3?
3. Why do you think Mr. and Mrs. Bennet refused to take responsibility for the irrational decision making of their naive daughter?
4. What did Lydia believe she would achieve by running away? Upon returning, why didn't she feel guilty for her rash decisions?
5. How are Mrs. Bennet and Lady Catherine similar?
6. What is Jane Austen's opinion on relationships and how does she think they can best be achieved?
7. Did Darcy pay off Wickham in order to marry Elizabeth or to protect the image of the family?

# Important Themes

## Social Classes

Austen illustrates that social classes are not all that matter because each relationship crosses class distinctions. She wanted to emphasize that a person's character mattered more than class. The classes determine who is important, who marries whom, and who can interact with whom. Behavior towards others also depends on social class. Society expected different behaviors from each social class. Actions were predetermined by the classes.

## First Impressions

Austen shows that first impressions are not always correct. She also wanted to show that although first impressions are inevitable, they should be altered once the true character is seen. What is first heard about a person determines how the relationship with others will be, for example, invitations to dinners or parties. Judgement plays a huge role in the development of characters. How society views each character and within each class determines how others view him or her. (The original title of the novel was *First Impressions*.)

## Marriage/Relationships

Austen portrays a society in which marriage decisions are based on wealth and convenience rather than love. She also wanted to show how people can overcome society's rules and demands. The book addresses the issue of failed relationships and how people endured them based on society's perspective of marriage. Austen shows a contrast between marriages of convenience and marriages of love.

## Importance of Family

Austen discusses how everyday actions of family members reflect on the family as a whole. She portrays how one personality can affect the entire family dynamic. Also, Austen wants to emphasize how parental influence affects choices of marriage and friendship.



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