

# **BOOK CLUB TO GO!**

## **Pride and Prejudice**

### **By Jane Austen**

#### **Introduction**

Elizabeth Bennet is a country gentleman's daughter in 19th Century England. She is one of five daughters, a plight that her father bears as best he can with common sense and a general disinterest in the silliness of his daughters. Elizabeth is his favorite because of her level-headed approach to life when his own wife's greatest concern is getting her daughters married off to well-established gentlemen. Only Jane, Elizabeth's older sister, is nearly as sensible and practical as Elizabeth, but Jane is also the beauty of the family, and therefore, Mrs. Bennet's highest hope for a good match.

When Mr. Bingley, a young gentleman of London, takes a country estate near to the Bennet's home, Mrs. Bennet begins her match-making schemes without any trace of subtlety or dignity. Despite Mrs. Bennet's embarrassing interference, Mr. Bingley and Jane become fond of one another. Mr. Darcy, who has accompanied Bingley to the country, begins his acquaintance with Elizabeth, her family, and their neighbors with smug condescension and proud distaste for all of the country people. Elizabeth, learning of his dislike, makes it a point to match his disgust with her own venom. She also hears from a soldier that she has a fondness for that Darcy has misused the man. Without thinking through the story, Elizabeth immediately seizes upon it as another, more concrete reason to hate Mr. Darcy. She contradicts and argues with Darcy each time they meet, but somewhere along the way he begins to like Elizabeth.

When Bingley leaves the countryside suddenly and makes no attempts to contact Jane anymore, the young woman is heartbroken. Elizabeth, who had thought well of Bingley, believes that there is something amiss in the way that he left Jane in the lurch. Only when Elizabeth goes to visit her friend at the estate of Darcy's aunt does the mystery begin to unfold. After several encounters with Mr. Darcy while visiting her friend, Elizabeth is shocked when Darcy proposes to her. Elizabeth refuses him and questions him about the way that he misused her soldier friend and his undoubted role in the way that Bingley abandoned Jane. Darcy writes a letter to explain himself, and Elizabeth is embarrassed to learn that she had been misled about Darcy's character. Had she known the truth, she would have loved Darcy as he loved her. Darcy leaves that part of the country before she can sort out her feelings and make amends with him. Then she meets him again when she is touring the gardens of his estate with her aunt and uncle. Darcy treats her with kindness and she believes he may still love her, but before anything can be done about it, she learns that one of her younger sisters has shacked

up with the very soldier who misled Elizabeth and the rest of her family about Mr. Darcy. Elizabeth returns home immediately.

When the indignity of her sister's shot-gun wedding is straightened out, Elizabeth is surprised that Darcy returns to the country with Bingley. She expected that the shame of her sister's actions had ruined any chances of a relationship with Mr. Darcy, or Jane and Bingley. Elizabeth learns from her aunt that Darcy did a great part to help get her younger sister properly married to the infamous soldier. Jane and Bingley sort out the misunderstanding that drove him away before and get engaged. Then Elizabeth and Darcy work out their misunderstandings and agree to marry.

*(BookRags.com)*

### **About the Author**

Jane Austen (December 16, 1775 –July 18, 1817) was an English novelist whose realism, biting social commentary and masterful use of free indirect speech, burlesque and irony have earned her a place as one of the most widely read and best-loved writers in British literature.

Austen lived her entire life as part of a large and close-knit family located on the lower fringes of English gentry. She was educated primarily by her father and older brothers as well as through her own reading. The steadfast support of her family was critical to Austen's development as a professional writer. Austen's artistic apprenticeship lasted from her teenage years until she was about thirty-five years old. During this period, she wrote three major novels and began a fourth. From 1811 until 1815, with the release of *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* (1815), she achieved success as a published writer. She wrote two additional novels, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, both published after her death in 1817, and began a third, eventually titled *Sanditon*, but died before completing it.

Austen's works critique the novels of sensibility of the second half of the eighteenth century and are part of the transition to nineteenth-century realism. Austen's plots, though fundamentally comic, highlight the dependence of women on marriage to secure social standing and economic security. Like those of Samuel Johnson, one of the strongest influences on her writing, her works are concerned with moral issues.

During her lifetime, Austen's works brought her little fame and only a few positive reviews. Through the mid-nineteenth century, her novels were admired only by literary elite. However, the publication of her nephew's *A Memoir of the Life of Jane Austen*, in 1870, introduced her life and works to a wider public. By the 1940s, Austen was firmly ensconced in academia as a "great English writer".

*(Wikipedia)*

## Reviews

“In the sparkling comedy of manners that follows, Jane Austen shows the folly of judging by first impressions and superbly evokes the friendships, gossip and snobberies of provincial middle-class life.” – *Penguin Group USA*

“The celestial brightness of *Pride and Prejudice* is unequalled even in Jane Austen's other work; after a life of much disappointment and grief, in which some people would have seen nothing but tedium and emptiness, she stepped forth as an author, breathing gaiety and youth, robed in dazzling light.” -- *Elizabeth Jenkins from BookRags.com*

## Further Reading

*Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen

*Mansfield Park* by Jane Austen

*Emma* by Jane Austen

*Persuasion* by Jane Austen

## **Film Adaptation of the Novel**

Most works of literature undergo significant cuts when adapted for film; in this production, the story was compressed into 2 hours and 9 minutes of screen time. Some of the most notable changes from the original book include:

- Heavy time compression of several major sequences, including Elizabeth's visit to Rosings Park and Hunsford Parsonage, Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley, and Lydia's elopement and its subsequent crisis.
- The elimination of several supporting characters, including Louisa Hurst, Mr. Hurst, Maria Lucas, Mr. and Mrs. Phillips, the Gardiners' children, and various military officers and townspeople.
- The elimination of several sections in which characters reflect or converse on events that have recently occurred - for example, Elizabeth's chapter-long change of mind after reading Darcy's letter.

The filmmakers changed several scenes to more romantic locales than the ones in the book. For instance, in the film, Darcy first proposes outdoors in a rainstorm near a beautiful lake; in the book, this scene takes place inside a parsonage. In the film, his second proposal occurs on the misty moors as dawn breaks; in the book, he and Elizabeth are walking down a country lane in broad daylight.

The American release version included a final scene (not in the novel) of the married Darcys enjoying a romantic evening at Pemberley. This ending did not test well with British audiences, so it was cut for UK and international release. The British version ends with Mr. Bennet's blessing upon Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy's union, thus circumventing the last chapter in the novel, which summarizes the lives of the Darcys and the other main characters over the next several years.

## **Awards**

*Pride & Prejudice* garnered a number of nominations in the 2005/2006 film awards season, notably four nominations in the Academy Awards: Best Actress in a Leading Role for Keira Knightley, Achievement in Art Direction, Achievement in Costume Design for Jacqueline Duran, and Achievement in Music Written for Motion Pictures (Original Score) for Dario Marianelli's score.

(Wikipedia)

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### **Jane Austen**

#### **Possible Discussion Questions**

1. An earlier version of *Pride and Prejudice* was entitled *First Impressions*. What role do first impressions play in the story? In which cases do first impressions turn out to be inaccurate, in which cases correct?
2. The initial mutual dislike of two people destined to love each other, has become a cliché of the Hollywood romance. Can you think of any examples?
3. Describe Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's relationship. How does the author depict marriage through the varied relationships in the novel?
4. Mr. Bennet's honesty and wry humor make him one of the most appealing characters in the book. Yet, as the story unfolds, it becomes clear that he has failed as a father. In what ways does Mr. Bennet let his children down? How does his action, or inaction, affect the behavior of his daughters? His wife? The course of the story?
5. Both Elizabeth and Darcy undergo transformations over the course of the book. How does each change and how is the transformation brought about? Could Elizabeth's transformation have happened without Darcy's? Or vice versa?
6. After Jane becomes engaged to Bingley, she says she wishes Elizabeth could be as happy as she is. Elizabeth replies, "If you were to give me forty such men, I never could be so happy as you. Till I have your disposition, your goodness, I never can have your happiness." Do you think Elizabeth's statement is true? Is it better to be good, to think the best of people, and be happy? Or is it better to see the world accurately, and feel less happiness?
7. Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Collins, and Lady Catherine de Bourgh are famously comic characters. What makes them so funny? How does Elizabeth's perception of them affect your trust in Elizabeth's views of other people in the book, particularly of Wickham and Darcy?
8. For most of the book, pride prevents Darcy from having what he most desires. Why is he so proud? How is his pride displayed? Is Elizabeth proud? Which characters are not proud? Are they better off?

9. How are the different social classes portrayed in this book?
10. In what ways are the themes and concerns of *Pride and Prejudice* timeless? In what ways are they particular to the times in which Austen wrote the book?

*(Penguin Group USA, ReadingGroupGuides.com & Manitowoc Public Library)*