

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Emma (Unabridged) by Jane Austen

Book Information

Jane Austen, Emma (Unabridged)
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This classic novel is about a self-assured young lady whose capricious behavior is dictated by romantic fancy.

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Main Characters

Emma Woodhouse the principal character in the story; a twenty-one-year-old woman who has decided she will never marry and tries to "help" others find happiness

Frank Churchill Mr. Weston's son by his first marriage, with whom Emma becomes good friends

Isabella Emma's sister who lives in London with her husband and children

Jane Fairfax Mrs. Bates's granddaughter and Miss Bates's niece; a young woman of Emma's age who has been taken in by the Campbell family and must work as a governess unless she marries a well-to-do man

Miss Harriet Smith a young woman of unknown parentage whom Emma befriends and tries to "help" with her questionable matchmaking

Miss Taylor/Mrs. Weston Emma's close friend and governess for sixteen years who marries Mr. Weston, and whose move out of Hartfield is seen as a tragedy by Mr. Woodhouse

Mr. and Mrs. Churchill Frank's aunt and uncle, who have raised him since he was a young boy

Mr. and Mrs. Dixon the Campbell's daughter and son-in-law

Mr. and Mrs. Suckling Mrs. Elton's sister and brother-in-law

Mr. Elton the Highbury vicar who is the object of Emma's first misguided matchmaking with Harriet

Mr. John Knightley Isabella's husband and a prosperous lawyer

Mr. Knightley Mr. John Knightley's brother; a friend and frequent visitor at Hartfield, who ends up marrying Emma

Mr. Robert Martin a young farmer whose family took in Harriet for several months and who finally succeeds in marrying Harriet

Mr. Weston the Woodhouses' neighbor and Miss Taylor's husband; also Frank Churchill's father

Mr. Woodhouse Emma's father; a hypochondriac of sorts who dislikes venturing away from Hartfield

Mrs. and Miss Bates an elderly mother and her single daughter who are quite poor and feel honored by anyone who calls at their home

Mrs. Elton/Augusta Hawkins Mr. Elton's wife; a woman who thinks highly of herself and her connections

Vocabulary

barouche-landau a type of enclosed four-wheeled carriage with seats facing each other and a removable or collapsible top

conundrum a riddle in which a question is answered by a pun

pianoforte a piano

vouchsafe to be gracious enough to give or grant

yeoman an independent small farmer

Synopsis

Emma Woodhouse is a twenty-one-year-old woman who lives with her father at their home of Hartfield in the village of Highbury. At the beginning of the story, Emma's governess, Miss Taylor, has just married Mr. Weston, and the newlyweds live nearby at Randalls. Emma's father, Mr. Woodhouse, is easily depressed, and he sees Miss Taylor's marriage and move away from Hartfield as reason to mourn.

Shortly after the wedding, Emma befriends a young

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woman named Miss Harriet Smith. Harriet has an unknown parentage and is living at a school run by Mrs. Goddard. Prior to becoming friends with Emma, she had spent several months at the Martins' farm. During that stay, Mr. Robert Martin had fallen in love with Harriet. He proposed to her in a letter, and Harriet asked Emma what she should do.

Emma thinks Harriet can find a better match than a farmer. In fact, she thinks Mr. Elton, the vicar, has deep feelings for Harriet. Emma subtly advises Harriet to refuse the proposal in a tactful way. However, Emma's matchmaking skills backfire when she discovers that Mr. Elton loves her instead of Harriet. After this revelation, she vows never to be a matchmaker again. Mr. Elton promptly leaves the area for a few months and returns with a wife who thinks highly of herself.

While Mr. Elton is away at Bath, Jane Fairfax returns to Highbury. Shortly after Jane arrives, Frank Churchill visits Randalls. Frank and Emma become good friends and spend a lot of time together. After staying several weeks, however, Frank is suddenly called back to the Churchills because of Mrs. Churchill's ill health.

After Frank leaves, Emma thinks she might be in love with him. As time goes on, however, she decides she must stick to her vow of never marrying. She believes Harriet and Frank would make a good match.

When Frank returns several months later, Emma realizes he doesn't feel love for her either. Mr. Knightley tells Emma he thinks Frank has feelings for Jane Fairfax. Emma dismisses the idea immediately and continues to think Harriet will end up with Frank.

Frank has to leave suddenly again when Mrs. Churchill takes a turn for the worse. At this time, Jane decides she will accept a governess position with Mrs. Smallridge. She becomes very ill after making the decision, and Emma tries in vain to help her.

After Mrs. Churchill dies, Frank finally reveals that he and Jane Fairfax have had a secret engagement for months. Emma is happy about the news except for the fact that she thinks Harriet will be devastated. Harriet, however, has been admiring Mr. Knightley, not Frank Churchill. It is this revelation that makes Emma realize her true feelings--she loves Mr. Knightley herself.

After Harriet tells Emma all the reasons she thinks Mr. Knightley loves her, Emma is desolate. She is overcome with joy, however, when she discovers Mr. Knightley has been in love with her since she was thirteen. The two decide they will be married and will live at Hartfield so Mr. Woodhouse can live in his own home. Harriet and Emma decide it is best if they don't see each other for a while. When Harriet takes a trip to London for a change of scenery, she meets Mr. Robert Martin again. He proposes for a second time, and Harriet gladly accepts. In the end, Harriet, Emma, and Frank are all married in consecutive months to the people they have always loved.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Why did Frank and Jane have a secret engagement?

Frank was afraid Mrs. Churchill wouldn't approve of someone of Jane's social standing.

Literary Analysis

The author divides the book into three volumes. Review the organization of the book. On what basis do you think the volumes are organized?

Each volume marks a change in Emma's life regarding Frank Churchill. She grows more mature and discovers something about herself as one volume goes into the next.

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Inferential Comprehension

Predict what will happen to Mr. Woodhouse.

He will most likely live to a very old age because of his healthy eating and living habits. He will become a total recluse at Hartfield and enjoy the visits of friends and family.

Constructing Meaning

What do you think of Emma's advice to Harriet to decline Mr. Robert Martin's proposal of marriage?

She probably shouldn't have suggested it because Harriet and Robert did love each other. Emma's interference caused a lot of heartache for Harriet.

Recognizing Feelings Emma realizes she loves Mr. Knightley when Harriet professes her true feelings for him. Ask the students to think about a time when a certain circumstance made them realize their true feelings about someone or something. Discuss how their situations were the same or different from Emma's.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting *Emma* takes place in the early 1800s in England. During the story, it seems that most of the characters spend an inordinate amount of time calling on each other. Little mention is made of the work anyone does, whether at home or at a job. Ask the students to conduct research and write about a typical day in the life of a lawyer, minister, doctor, housewife, governess, and teacher in England during the early 1800s. What was their principal mode of transportation? How much money did people make in their professions? What did they wear?

Understanding Characterization Emma thought she was good at matchmaking until she failed miserably at her attempts with Harriet. Have the students research the profession of the matchmaker. Are matchmakers still used in some cultures? What are the qualifications of a matchmaker? At what age is the couple matched? How often do the matches succeed?

Drawing Conclusions The author gives numerous clues regarding the fact that Frank and Jane have a romantic interest in one another. The students should individually find at least three of these instances and then compare their answers with one another. How many "clues" did they find? Had they guessed the relationship before it was revealed in the story?