

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Pride and Prejudice (Unabridged) by Jane Austen

Book Information

Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice (Unabridged)

Quiz Number: 714

Modern Library/Random House, 2000

ISBN 0-679-78326-1; LCCN

281 Pages

Book Level: 12.0

Interest Level: UG

In early nineteenth-century England, a spirited young woman copes with the courtship of a snobbish gentleman as well as the romantic entanglements of her four sisters.

Topics: Classics, Classics (All); Common Core State Standards Appendix B Titles, CCSS Grade Band 11-CCR; Countries/Regions, England; Emotions, Love; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 9-12; Series, Scholastic Classics; Social Issues, Prejudice; What Kids Are Reading, 2012, 100 Most Read Fiction, ATOS Book Levels 9.0-12.9; What Kids Are Reading, 2013, 100 Most Read Fiction, ATOS Book Levels 9.0-12.9; What Kids Are Reading, 2014, 75 Most Read Fiction, ATOS Book Levels 9.7-14.1

Main Characters

Caroline Bingley the haughty sister of Charles, who tries to control his life as well as win Mr. Darcy's hand for herself

Catherine (Kitty) Bennet a flighty young woman who improves under Elizabeth's guidance

Charles Bingley a congenial young gentleman who falls in love and marries Jane Bennet

Charlotte Lucas a plain, intelligent woman and friend of Elizabeth who marries Mr. Collins so she may have her own home

Colonel Fitzwilliam Darcy's well-mannered cousin

Elizabeth Bennet the principal character of the story; a twenty-year-old, candid young woman who first disdains but later loves Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy

Fitzwilliam Darcy a man first misunderstood to be proud, who is later found to be reserved and generous; he eventually wins Elizabeth's heart

Georgiana Darcy the shy and quiet sixteen-year-old sister of Fitzwilliam Darcy

Jane Bennet the eldest Bennet sister, a kind, gentle woman of twenty-three who falls in love with Mr. Charles Bingley

Lady Catherine de Bourgh the rich and dictatorial aunt of Darcy; she wants Darcy to marry her daughter

Lydia Bennet a headstrong, flirtatious girl of sixteen who elopes and then marries the disreputable Mr. Wickham

Mary Bennet the quiet daughter of the Bennets; she finds peace in scholarly activities and tends to moralize

Miss de Bourgh the pale and sickly daughter of Lady Catherine

Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner the astute and dependable uncle and aunt of the Bennet girls

Mr. Bennet a cynical and somewhat detached father and husband; he finds solace in his library

Mr. Collins a haughty cousin of the Bennets who is line to inherit Mr. Bennet's estate; he is the clergyman for Lady de Bourgh's parish and marries Charlotte Lucas

Mr. George Wickham a handsome man whose manners attract many ladies; he is deceitful and has little conscience for the people he uses

Mrs. Bennet a flighty, gossiping woman whose main goal is to see that all her daughters are married

Mrs. Hurst Charles Bingley's married sister

Sir William and Lady Lucas prosperous neighbors to the Bennets

Vocabulary

alacrity with eagerness or quickness

caprice a whim or an impulsive change of mind

chaise a light, open, usually two-wheeled carriage drawn by a horse

connubial relating to marriage

copse small trees forming a thicket

entail to limit the inheritance of property to a specific succession of heirs

felicity delight, great happiness

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panegyric a tribute of praise

precipitance an action done in great haste

supercilious proud or haughty

Synopsis

News of the leasing of the Netherfield house to a rich, young bachelor, Charles Bingley, reaches the ears of Mrs. Bennet, whose main occupation is to find husbands for her five daughters. Mrs. Bennet presses her husband, Mr. Bennet, to visit Mr. Bingley soon so the girls can become acquainted with him. Mr. Bennet toys with Mrs. Bennet through dry humor, but he honors her request.

A ball takes place soon afterward where Mr. Bingley makes his social appearance in the neighborhood, along with his sisters, Caroline Bingley and Mrs. Hurst, and a friend of his, Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy. At the ball, Charles Bingley is declared charming, and Mr. Darcy exceedingly proud and ill mannered. Charles appears taken with Jane Bennet, the eldest daughter and family beauty. Mr. Darcy refuses to dance with Elizabeth Bennet, saying he would not dance with a lady whom other men had already overlooked. But, over time, attracted by her wit and eyes, Mr. Darcy's interest in Elizabeth begins to grow. Her mind, however, is made up regarding his personality, and she refuses to dance with him at a later ball.

Jane and Bingley's relationship begins to blossom. Although Bingley's sisters pretend to be fond of Jane, Elizabeth suspects them of insincerity. The sisters are concerned about Jane's family, particularly the talkative Mrs. Bennet and the wild antics of Lydia and Kitty, who have become boy-crazy since the militia has located to the nearby town of Meryton. Caroline Bingley, who hopes to win Mr. Darcy for herself, worries about his attentions to Elizabeth. Caroline comes to Netherfield to nurse Jane, who has caught a cold after riding in the rain to visit the sisters. Caroline wishes for Jane's early recovery, which soon comes.

Mr. Collins, a haughty cousin of the Bennets and heir to Mr. Bennet's property because there is no

male descendent, now arrives at the Bennet household. He is a clergyman and speaks of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who has granted him his position and has urged him to marry. He has come to the Bennets to seek a wife and sets his hopes on Elizabeth. Elizabeth curtly refuses him, much to her mother's dismay and father's approval, so Mr. Collins turns his interest to Charlotte Lucas, Elizabeth's best friend.

A new officer, Mr. Wickham, is commissioned to the militia and attracts the interest of the local women because of his charming manners. Mr. Wickham was Mr. Darcy's father's godson and apparently his favorite, and Elizabeth believes his story of being denied his rightful inheritance by Mr. Darcy out of jealousy. When Mr. Wickham does not attend the ball the Bingleys host at Netherfield, Elizabeth's judgment of Mr. Darcy's conceit deepens. Shortly after the ball, the entire household at Netherfield moves to London. Jane receives a short note from Caroline, implying that Charles has affections for Mr. Darcy's sister. Elizabeth tries to convince Jane that Charles's affection for her is real, and his sisters are just trying to keep them apart. Jane's hopes are dashed, however, when another note indicates the Bingleys will be wintering in London.

At Christmas time, Mrs. Gardiner, the girls' aunt, arrives and invites Jane to accompany her back to London for a change of scenery. Elizabeth knows Mrs. Gardiner's hopes of reuniting Jane and Charles but doubts her ability to succeed since the Gardiners live in an unfashionable part of the city. Elizabeth, with Charlotte's father and sister, sees Jane in March on her way to Kent to visit her now-married friend, Charlotte. Jane appears happy, but admits she has not seen Charles and had only one short visit from his sisters. Elizabeth thinks Charles has no idea that Jane is in London, the news being withheld from him.

After arriving at the Collins home and hearing the boasting of her cousin, the party is invited to Lady Catherine de Bourgh's estate for dinner. Lady Catherine is a domineering woman and her daughter is small and sickly. Elizabeth is indirect

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with her answers to Lady Catherine and, from the Lady's reaction, realizes she is not used to being trifled with. Darcy shortly thereafter arrives to visit his aunt, Lady Catherine, with his cousin, Colonel Fitzwilliam. Mr. Darcy makes calls to the Collins home and tension is present in their conversations. Elizabeth deduces from the pleasant-mannered Colonel Fitzwilliam that Mr. Darcy had discouraged the relationship between Jane and Charles Bingley. After learning this, she excuses herself from going to a meal hosted by Lady Catherine. Mr. Darcy comes to inquire about her health and suddenly professes his love for her and proposes marriage. He proceeds to speak of his superiority to her familial relations. Elizabeth flatly refuses him, and when he asks why, she blames him for separating Jane and Bingley and for his mistreatment of Wickham. He leaves without answering, but gives Elizabeth a letter the next day explaining his position on Jane and Charles. He had not detected a special affection in Jane for Charles and had wished to spare his friend future grief. In confidence, he shares Wickham's mode of operating, including his plan to elope with Mr. Darcy's younger sister. Over time, Elizabeth comes to acknowledge the truth of the letter and her prejudice against Mr. Darcy begins to wane. Elizabeth returns home without seeing Mr. Darcy again.

Lydia is fussing over the news of the militia's move to Brighton and expresses her desire for the family to follow them. An invitation comes from an officer's wife for Lydia to join her and her husband under their supervision on a trip to Brighton. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet allow Lydia to go even after Elizabeth speaks disapprovingly about it. Elizabeth leaves shortly thereafter to accompany her aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, on a tour that will take her to the area where Mr. Darcy's home, Pemberley, is located in Derbyshire. While there, Elizabeth is reluctantly persuaded to visit Pemberley when she learns that Mr. Darcy is not presently there. While visiting, Mr. Darcy unexpectedly arrives and is extremely cordial to Elizabeth and Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner. He wants Elizabeth to meet his sister and Elizabeth consents. Miss Darcy visits the next morning and Elizabeth returns the visit the next day

at Pemberley. These pleasant relations are abruptly ended though, when Elizabeth receives a letter from Jane explaining Lydia has run off with Mr. Wickham for Scotland. She tells Mr. Darcy what has happened before leaving with the Gardiners for home that day. Elizabeth arrives to find Mrs. Bennet in bed in a state of boisterous despair. After an intense search by Mr. Bennet and then Mr. Gardiner, the runaway couple is finally located in London, and a marriage is arranged for them. When Lydia visits home with Mr. Wickham before they must leave for his commission in the army, she seems unaffected by the trouble she has brought to the family. Lydia lets slip that Mr. Darcy attended her wedding. Elizabeth writes to Mrs. Gardiner asking for an explanation. Her aunt tells her of Mr. Darcy's involvement in paying off Mr. Wickham's debts and arranging for Lydia's marriage to save the Bennets' propriety.

The Wickhams leave, and soon the Bingleys return to Netherfield along with Mr. Darcy. Elizabeth's feelings for Mr. Darcy have grown tender, but she sees no sign from him of any intentions. Mr. Darcy then returns to London for ten days. Bingley and Jane's romance is rekindled, and they are soon engaged. Lady Catherine pays the Bennets a visit and tells Elizabeth of a rumor that Mr. Darcy was to be engaged to Elizabeth. Elizabeth perturbs Lady Catherine by not promising to refuse his proposal. Lady Catherine hopes the prearranged union of her daughter and Mr. Darcy would occur and, when she shares the outcome of her conversation with Elizabeth with Mr. Darcy, he knows that her feelings towards him have changed. Mr. Darcy returns to Netherfield and, when they next meet, Elizabeth thanks him for all he did for Lydia. He asks again for her hand. She consents and, after convincing her father of her true feelings for Mr. Darcy, he consents and they become engaged. Elizabeth becomes the matron of Pemberley, where she is kind to her sisters, forgiving to Lady Catherine, fond of Miss Darcy, and happy in marriage.

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Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Why are family connections and propriety considered so important in this story?

The story takes place in an age when marriage is seen primarily as an economic arrangement for the benefit of the woman, man, or family. A less-well-off woman could hope to rise in social class by a beneficial marriage, or a man could raise his status if he married into a wealthier situation. If a family's reputation is ruined by some impropriety, the chances of a successful marriage would decline.

Literary Analysis

Pride and Prejudice is considered a "comedy of manners." Have the students define the term and give specific examples from the narrative that support the definition. How did Austen use this genre effectively to point out the foibles of humanity?

After defining the term, the student can give any one of many examples. Jane Austen used this genre effectively in part because she exposes human shortcomings without being vicious. The subtlety with which she connects and comments on certain situations and people makes the story an intellectual exercise for the reader and enriches the humor once the ironies are discovered.

Inferential Comprehension

Jane and Elizabeth Bennet differ in their personalities. What is the basis of their attachment to one another?

Their attachment stems from more than sisterly affection. They admire and desire the traits they see in one another. Elizabeth not only is happy for Jane for her beauty, but also wishes for the gentleness of spirit that Jane has. Jane respects Elizabeth's insights and may wish she could have some of the "fire" of Elizabeth's personality. They know their secrets are safe with each other and trust they have each other's best interests in heart for all situations.

Constructing Meaning

Jane misconstrues some of Mr. Darcy's reserve as false pride. Later, after reading his letter, she discovers the care he has for Georgiana and the generosity he has shown Mr. Wickham. She then begins to change her feelings toward him and realizes she was looking at him through prejudiced eyes. Think back over a time you may have judged someone the wrong way initially. What happened to change your first opinion?

Students should relate an incident of misunderstanding or prejudice from their own experience. They should indicate a moment of change or realization when their initial impressions were wrong. It may stem from their own realization, something the person said, or a suggestion by another that they have misjudged the person's personality or intent.

Teachable Skills

Understanding the Author's Craft Parallels sometimes exist between an author's life and the subject matter they choose to write about. Encourage the students to do a background study on Jane Austen's life and comment on how her situation allowed her to become adept at satirizing the habits of the various social classes of people. Have them note any direct correlation they can find between her life and the novel.

Comparing and Contrasting *Pride and Prejudice*

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is a wonderful book for the study of characterization. Have the students generate a list of characters and their distinguishing traits and behavior. Then, based on their impressions, have them choose modern-day people they might be more familiar with in the media today, such as actors or actresses from television shows or movies to represent these characters. The students can then further compare their list with their fellow classmates' and discuss the similarities or differences in perceiving characteristics.

Recognizing Detail The author mentions various locations in England throughout the book. Have the students obtain a map of Great Britain and follow the travels of Elizabeth, Jane, Mr. Darcy, and Lydia. Indicate on the map the general location of Longbourn, Netherfield, Rosings, London, and Pemberley. The story probably takes place in the early 1800's when travel occurred mostly by foot or horse and carriage. It might be interesting to find out what was considered a day's travel at that time, in order to gain perspective about distances and communications between households in a time of no phones, trains, or automobiles.

Responding to Literature Jane Austen wrote with wit and satire about the social classes. Another author might not be so gentle in describing human flaws and instead write a parody, exaggerating the foibles. It might be fun to stage a parody of a few chapters of *Pride and Prejudice*. The students might first want to research the rise of burlesque in theater to give them a background perspective.