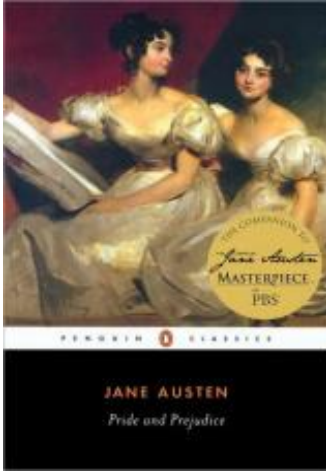


Pride and Prejudice

by Jane Austen



About the Book

(Excerpted from **The Jane Austen Book Club**)

Pride and Prejudice was originally entitled **First Impressions**. It was written between 1796 and 1797, and heavily revised before its publication in 1813. It is the most famous of the novels. Austen herself characterized it as "rather too light and bright, and sparkling," suggesting it needed some "solemn specious nonsense" for contrast. In an inversion of the classic Cinderella fairy tale, when the hero, Fitzwilliam Darcy, first sees the heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, at a ball, he refuses to dance with her.

Elizabeth is one of five Bennet daughters, second in age only to the beautiful Jane. The Bennet estate is entailed on a male cousin, and although the girls are comfortable enough as long as their father lives, their long-term financial survival depends on their marrying.

The story revolves around Elizabeth's continued dislike of Darcy and Darcy's growing attraction to Elizabeth. When she meets the rake Wickham, he dislikes Darcy intensely; she is quickly won over by their shared distaste. A subplot involves her father's heir, the Reverend Collins, who attempts to amend his financial impact on the family by asking Elizabeth to marry him. Elizabeth rejects him—he is pompous and stupid—so he proposes to Charlotte Lucas, Elizabeth's best friend, who accepts.

Darcy proposes to Elizabeth, but rudely. Elizabeth rudely rejects him. Wickham elopes with Lydia, the youngest Bennet sister, and Darcy is instrumental in finding the couple and buying Lydia a marriage. This, along with his steadfast love and improved manners, convinces Elizabeth that he is the man for her after all. Jane marries Darcy's friend Mr. Bingley on the same day Elizabeth and Darcy are married. Both sisters end up rich.

Discussion Guide

1. *Pride and Prejudice* is probably Austen's most famous, most beloved book. One element, the initial mutual dislike of two people destined to love each other, has become a cliché of the Hollywood romance. I'm sure you can think of numerous examples.

This book has been described by scholars as a very conservative text. Did you find it so? What sort of position do you see it taking on the class system?

It has also been described as Austen's most idealistic book. What do you suppose is meant by that?

2. In 1814 Mary Russell Mitford wrote: "It is impossible not to feel in every line of *Pride and Prejudice*. . . the entire want of taste which could produce so pert, so worldly a heroine as the beloved of such a man as Darcy. . . Darcy should have married Jane."

Would you have liked the book as well if Jane were its heroine?

Have you ever seen a movie version in which the woman playing Jane was, as Austen imagined her, truly more beautiful than the woman playing Elizabeth?

Who doesn't love Elizabeth Bennet?!!

3. Two central characters in Austen have her own first name.

In *Emma*: Jane Fairfax is a decorous, talented, beautiful woman.

In *Pride and Prejudice*: Jane Bennet is everything lovely.

What do you make of that?

4. Lydia and Wickham pose a danger to the Bennet family as long as they are unmarried and unchecked. But as a married couple, with little improvement in their behavior, this danger vanishes.

In *Pride and Prejudice* marriage serves many functions. It is a romantic union, a financial merger, and a vehicle for social regulation. Scholar and writer Mary Poovey said that Austen's goal "is to make propriety and romantic desire absolutely congruent."

Think about all the marriages in the book with respect to how well they are fulfilling those functions.

Is marriage today still an institution of social regulation?

What about it would change if gay marriage were legally recognized?

5. Austen suggests that in order to marry well a woman must be pretty, respectable, and have money. In the world of *Pride and Prejudice*, which of these is most important? Spare a thought for some of the unmarried women in the book-

Mary and Kitty Bennet, Miss de Bourgh, Miss Georgiana Darcy, poor, disappointed Caroline Bingley. Which of them do you picture marrying some day? Which of them do you picture marrying well?

6. Was Charlotte Lucas right to marry Reverend Collins?

7. What are your feelings about Mr. Bennet? Is he a good father? A good husband? A good man?

8. Darcy says that one of Wickham's motivations in his attempted elopement with Georgiana was revenge. What motivations might he have had for running off with Lydia? (Besides the obvious. . .)

9. Elizabeth Bennet says, ". . . people themselves alter so much, that there is something new to be observed in them for ever."

Do any of the characters in the book change substantially? Or do they, as Elizabeth says of Darcy, "in essentials" remain much as they ever were?

10. Elizabeth is furious with Darcy for breaking up the match between Jane and Mr. Bingley. Although he initially defends himself, she changes his mind. Later when Lady Catherine attempts to interfere in his own courtship, he describes this as unjustifiable.

Should you tell a friend if you think they're about to make a big mistake romantically?

Have you ever done so? How did that work out for you?

Author Bio

Jane Austen was born on 16 December 1775 at Steventon near Basingstoke, the seventh child of the rector of the parish. She lived with her family at Steventon until they moved to Bath when her father retired in 1801. After his death in 1805, she moved around with her mother; in 1809, they settled in Chawton, near Alton, Hampshire. Here she remained, except for a few visits to London, until in May 1817 she moved to Winchester to be near her doctor. There she died on 18 July 1817.

As a girl Jane Austen wrote stories, including burlesques of popular romances. Her works were only published after much revision, four novels being published in her lifetime. These are **Sense and Sensibility** (1811), **Pride and Prejudice** (1813), **Mansfield Park** (1814) and **Emma** (1816). Two other novels, **Northanger Abbey** and **Persuasion**, were published posthumously in 1818 with a biographical notice by her brother, Henry Austen, the first formal announcement of her authorship. **Persuasion** was written in a race against failing health in 1815-16. She also left two earlier compositions, a short epistolary novel, **Lady Susan**, and an unfinished novel, **The Watsons**. At the time of her death, she was working on a new novel, **Sanditon**, a fragmentary draft of which survives.

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