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Pride and Prejudice

by

Jane Austen

1813



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by TheBestNotes Staff

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The novel is set in the 19th century in England. It is set principally in Longbourn, the Hertfordshire country town that is a mile from Meryton and twenty-four miles from London. It is a.....

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Major Characters

Mrs. Bennet - The match-making mother of five daughters. The wife of Mr. Bennet and "a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper," who embarrasses her older daughters with her lack of class and entertains her husband with her ignorance.

Mr. Bennet - A country gentleman, who is the sometimes irresponsible father of five daughters and the husband of Mrs. Bennet. He is fond of books and can be witty and amusing.

Jane Bennet - The eldest daughter of the Bennets who is pretty, shy, calm, gentle and good-natured; she falls in love with and marries Mr. Bingley.

Elizabeth Bennet (Lizzy) - The second daughter of the Bennets who is lively, intelligent, witty and sensible; she at first strongly dislikes Mr. Darcy and then falls in love with him.

Marry Bennet - The third daughter, who is pedantic, tasteless, plain, vain, silly, and affected.

Catherine Bennet (Kitty) - The fourth daughter, who is almost a non-entity in the novel except for chasing soldiers.

Lydia Bennet - The youngest daughter who is silly, thoughtless, stupid, unprincipled.....

Many additional major and minor characters are identified in the complete study guide.

CONFLICT

There are two major conflicts in the novel which develop the plot.

The first plot centers around Mrs. Bennet's desperate attempts to find suitable husbands for her marriageable daughters.

Protagonist - The Protagonist is Mrs. Bennet, whose 'business of life' is to get her daughters married. To this end, she is assiduously devoted throughout the novel. She presses her husband to develop an acquaintance with Mr. Bingley (a promising catch); she encourages the.....

Antagonist - Mrs. Bennet's antagonist is the problem she encounters in getting her daughters married, especially the eldest two. Bingley's abrupt departure.....

Climax - The climax of this plot is the engagement of Elizabeth to Darcy. Lydia has already eloped with Wickham, and Jane has accepted Bingley's.....

Outcome - The outcome of the conflict is a happy one. Mrs. Bennet's match-making problems are.....

The second plot revolves around Darcy trying to win Elizabeth's love.

Protagonist - Fitzwilliam Darcy, a handsome and proud aristocrat, falls in love with.....

Antagonist - Darcy's antagonist is the various 'obstacles' he has to overcome in order to win the love of Elizabeth, including her vulgar and indiscreet.....

Climax - A high point in the rising action is Lydia's elopement, for it threatens to thwart the relationship between Darcy and Elizabeth; but, on the contrary, it gives Darcy an.....

Outcome - This plot ends in comedy for Darcy accomplishes his goal, winning the.....

SHORT PLOT / CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

Pride and Prejudice is the story of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet and their five unmarried daughters. They live in the estate of Longbourn in Hertfordshire, a rural district about thirty miles from London. The family is not rich. Their property is 'entailed' to pass to the nearest male heir in the family, in this case to Mr. Collins. The main concern of Mrs. Bennet's life is to see that all her daughters are married, preferably to men with large fortunes. She sees an opportunity for her eldest daughter Jane when Mr. Charles Bingley, a wealthy gentleman from the city, occupies the nearby estate of Netherfield Park. In her excitement, she urges her husband to visit Mr. Bingley on the very first day of his arrival, before any of the other neighbors. Mr. Bennet complies to his wife's request and visits Mr. Bingley, but withholds information about his visit from the family.

At the next social gathering in Meryton, Bingley brings along his two sisters, Caroline Bingley and Louisa Hurst. But more importantly, he brings his closest friend, Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy. Bingley, who is charming and social, is immediately attracted to the modest and gentle Jane Bennet. Darcy, in contrast to Bingley, is proud, rude, and disagreeable. When Bingley suggests that Darcy dance with Elizabeth Bennet, he refuses and negatively comments on her looks. Elizabeth overhears the comment and develops a strong prejudice against Darcy. At the next ball in Netherfield, Darcy feels an attraction for.....

THEMES

Major Themes

The pivotal theme is that marriage is important to individuals and society. Throughout the novel, the author describes the various types of marriages and reasons behind them. Marriage out of economic compulsions can be seen in Charlotte's marriage to Collins. Marriage due to sensual pleasure can be seen in Lydia's marriage. The marriage of Jane and Elizabeth are the outcome of true love between well-matched persons.

Another major theme is that pride and prejudice both stand in the way of.....

Additional themes are identified in the complete study guide.

MOOD

The mood throughout the novel is formal and realistic to its nineteenth century setting. Even though it.....

BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

Jane Austen was born in 1775 at Steventon, Hampshire in southern England, where her father was a minister. She was the sixth child in a family of seven children. The family was very close, and Jane had a particular closeness to her sister Cassandra. Although she attended boarding school for a short while, she was mostly educated at home. Both she and Cassandra were attractive and attended country parties; neither of them married, although Jane had several proposals. Much of Jane's life is captured in the letters that she wrote to her sister, but Cassandra cut out any references there might have been about Jane's intimate, private life and her innermost thoughts. In spite of the missing information, the letters retain flashes of sharp wit and occasional coarseness.

Jane began to write at a young age. *Pride and Prejudice*, her most popular novel, was the first to be written, although not the first published. She wrote on it for.....

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

A general knowledge of the social and cultural setting in which a novel is written is important, for most

novels mirror the customs and values of a particular society, often criticizing it. The Hertfordshire country town where the greater part of the novel is set is Longbourn, only a mile from the market town of Meryton and 24 miles from London. The neighborhood around the Bennets is large, for they dine with twenty-four different families, only three of which are named. The Bennet's society is drawn largely from Meryton (which is the mother's background) rather than from the country (which is the father's), for she is.....

THE LITERARY BACKGROUND

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* appeared on the English literary scene in 1813. The author had worked on its realistic style and content for more than fifteen years, for she was a perfectionist in her approach to writing. Her first novel was unlike any of the hundreds of others written at the time, which were mainly Romantic (filled with emotion and passionate) or Gothic (filled with horror). Austen was the.....

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES

CHAPTER 1

Summary

The novel opens with an ironic statement about marriage, which is the axis around which the world of Longbourn turns: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife". Presently everyone in Longbourn, Hertfordshire, is excited about the fact that Mr. Bingley, an unmarried, rich young man, is to settle at Netherfield Park, a fine estate nearby. Mrs. Bennet's excitement is extraordinary, for she has five daughters that she wants to have married, especially the older ones. Her mind is fired with matrimonial speculations, and she tries to persuade her husband to pay a visit to Mr. Bingley as soon as he arrives. Mr. Bennet pokes fun at his wife's impetuosity and jokes that he will give the newcomer a carte blanche so that he can marry any one of their daughters, including the little Lizzy. Mrs. Bennet is nettled and accuses her husband of having no compassion for her poor nerves.

Notes

The first sentence of this chapter is one of the famous ones in English literature because of its masterful irony, its humorous tone, and its foreshadowing of the entire novel. It would appear from the formal opening words, "it is a truth universally acknowledged", that the novel is going to dedicate itself to lofty ideals. The second half of the sentence, however, reveals that the "universal truth" is nothing more than a social truth, which ironically is not a truth at all, but a misrepresentation of social facts. A man with a fortune does not need a wife nearly so much as a woman, who has no means of outside support in the 19th century, is greatly in need of a wealthy husband. The entire novel is really an explanation of how women and men pursue each other prior to marriage.

It is apparent from this chapter that the novel is to center on character development and relationship and to investigate with great detail the behavior and manners of the landed middle-class society of 19th century England. The family is the heart of the middle-class, and its preservation is vital. Marriage, the key subject matter of the book, is extremely important in order to continue the family and to supply stability and economic well-being for the women of the time.

At the beginning of the chapter, Mrs. Bennet is, as usual, displaying her stupidity and vulgarity. Her husband mercilessly mocks her silliness. It is obvious that Mrs. Bennet is a woman with little understanding and uncertain temperament, while her husband is shown to be serious, sarcastic, and cynical. He laughs at her total preoccupation with finding suitable husbands for her five daughters. Jane and Elizabeth, the two eldest daughters, are embarrassed by their mother's lack of class and blush every time she opens her mouth. Mrs. Bennet does, however, provide some entertainment to her lazy and heartless husband.

CHAPTER 2

Summary

Mr. Bennet is one of the first callers on Mr. Bingley, and he withholds this information merely to vex his wife. Still in the dark about her husband's visit, Mrs. Bennet seems ludicrously desperate to have her husband call on the new neighbor, and her husband's incessant talk about Mr. Bingley seems to rub salt over her wounds. As Mrs. Bennet grows more impatient and irritated with her husband, he casually informs his wife and daughters about his visit. They are all astonished at his promptness, and Mrs. Bennet is full of praise for him. She remarks that he is an "excellent father." Mr. Bennet, disgusted with his wife's outburst, leaves the room to take refuge in his study.

Notes

The second chapter is filled with unimportant events, but through them the author shows how important Mr. Bingley's arrival is to the country village. Everyone seems to be excited that a man of means is to live amongst them. The Bennets are particularly excited. Mr. Bennet is one of the first persons to visit Bingley at Netherfield Park, but he chooses to keep his visit a secret from his family. Mrs. Bennet, unaware of the visit, grows impatient and irritated with her husband for not greeting the eligible newcomer. Mrs. Bennet also reveals her preference for Lydia, her youngest daughter who is vain and stupid, and for Mary, the third daughter who pretends to be scholarly and reflective and is actually pompous and silly.....

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Elizabeth Bennet - Elizabeth is a spontaneous, high-spirited, vivacious, witty, and warm young lady. She is also a bright, complex, and intriguing individual who is realistic about life. Unlike her sister Jane, she is not ready to believe that everyone is flawless. She knows the 'impropriety' of her father and is aware that it springs from the unhappiness of his life with his wife. She also perceives the fickleness of her mother's temper and her crass social behavior. Even to the point of being saucy and blunt at times, Elizabeth is not afraid to speak her mind.

Throughout the novel, Elizabeth's encounters with Darcy are a battle of adult minds. Elizabeth's speeches, crackling with irony, filled with pep, and displaying vibrant humor, exert a magnetic pull on Darcy. He recognizes that she is a woman endowed with sense and sensibility, radically different from most young females that he knows. He is particularly impressed with her poise; she is not intimidated by the upper class or overawed by the arrogant Darcy.

Elizabeth's main flaw is an exaggerated prejudice. Her first negative impression of Darcy at the Netherfield ball, Wickham's tall story about him, and Darcy's influencing Bingley against Jane fuel her prejudice. She spends most of the novel truly disliking her future husband. When Darcy.....

Additional major characters are analyzed in the complete study guide.

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen creates a picture of the small, cocooned world of the middle class gentry -- with their commonplace joys and their commonplace sorrows. The central concern of this "comedy of manners" is Mrs. Bennet's dogged efforts to find suitable husbands for her eldest daughters. Of course, Mrs. Bennet's judgements cannot be trusted, for she is a nagging wife, an ineffectual mother, and a social misfit throughout the novel. Her repeated and continued foolishness is one of the things that holds the plot together into a unified whole.

The plot's focus on marriage is seen from the very beginning of the story. The arrival of Mr. Bingley, 'a single man of large fortune' at near-by Netherfield immediately fires the imagination of Mrs. Bennet. An

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acquaintance is struck and what follows is a series of parties, balls, and teas, which are very essential to the plot; it is at these social gatherings that the four main characters –Bingley and Jane and Darcy and Elizabeth – are brought together. They also serve to illustrate the.....

THEMES – THEME ANALYSIS

The central theme of the novel concerns itself with marriage, as indicated in the ironic opening line of the book: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." Throughout the novel, it is not the man who is seeking a spouse so much as it is Mrs. Bennet seeking suitable husbands for her older daughters.

The entire novel explores the various types of love and marriage. The Bennets' marriage is shown to be a disaster, with the wife playing the part of a fool and the husband retreating to live an uninvolved life in his ivory tower. In contrast to the marriage of the Bennets is the pleasant conjugal life of the Gardiners, who are mutually compatible and supportive. Charlotte Lucas' marriage to Mr. Collins is a compromise, one of economic necessity, so she will have a means of support. Lydia's love, largely sensual, is.....

Additional analysis of the themes is included in the complete study guide.

STUDY QUESTIONS – BOOK REPORT IDEAS

1.) Discuss the social background of *Pride and Prejudice*. Explain how this background is important to the novel. Who is the main protagonist of *Pride and Prejudice* and what/who is the antagonist. How is the conflict between them resolved?

2.) Comment on the opening statement of the novel and elucidate on how it reveals the theme of the book.....

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