

## Discussion Questions for “Pride and Prejudice” by Jane Austen June 30, 2018

1. The group read “Persuasion” several years ago, the theme centering around how much a person should be persuaded by the advice of others and how much they should be true to their own mind and heart. Do you see a similar theme in “Pride and Prejudice?”
2. In E.M. Forster’s “Room With a View,” Lucy Honeychurch faces a choice between the wealthy and cold Cecil Vyse and the middle-class intellect and passion of George Emerson; Lucy’s potential suitors’ relationship with and appreciation of nature affect her ultimate romantic choice. Characters are shown appreciation both cultivated and less tamed natural areas and prospects throughout the novel.
  - Is Mr. Darcy’s choice between Miss Bingley and Miss Elizabeth Bennett affected by each woman’s appreciation of nature?
  - Does Elizabeth Bennett select her future husband using similar criteria (conscious or not)?
  - How else does nature interplay with the characters?
3. Jane Austen often uses characters’ homes to reflect the tenants’ inner qualities.
  - What does the grandeur of Lady Catherine de Bourgh’s Rosings or the welcoming atmosphere at Mr. Bingley’s Netherfield say about Jane Austen’s thoughts about new wealth?
  - What does the natural elegance of Pemberley say about Mr. Darcy and the upper class?
4. Throughout “Pride and Prejudice,” characters exhibit these titular characteristics showing that “First Impressions,” the original title of the novel, and long-held impressions aren’t always reliable.
  - Instead of the beautiful appearance and hideous inside of Oscar Wilde’s “Picture of Dorian Gray,” Elizabeth’s examination of Mr. Darcy’s portrait during her tour of Pemberley reveals Mr. Darcy’s beautiful inside. Is this a turning point in Elizabeth’s prejudice?
  - What causes Mr. Darcy to allow his love for Elizabeth to overcome his pride?
  - How do various characters, from Miss Bingley, Mr. Collins, and Lady Catherine de Bourgh to Mrs. Bennett, Mr. Bennett, Jane Bennett, and Charlotte Lucas exhibit various flavors of pride and prejudice?
5. Many characters in the novel live on a continuum between taking themselves too seriously and taking things too lightly. Which characters are on each side of the continuum and do any characters move along the spectrum and why?
6. Why does Wickham select Elizabeth Bennett as a target for flirtation?
  - Does Wickham suspect Elizabeth stands to inherit from her father at any point in the novel?
  - Does Wickham see Elizabeth as a vehicle to besmirch Darcy’s character amongst people who didn’t know either of them?
  - Did Wickham actually appreciate Elizabeth’s lively and attractive personality?
7. Throughout the novel, we see many examples of poor parenting skills, from Mr. and Mrs. Bennett to Lady Catherine de Bourgh, but very strong sibling relationships. Where are the Bingleys parents? Why does Jane Austen choose to display few effective parents in the main action despite showing that some characters, like Mr. Darcy, are the result of excellent parents? Is Jane Austen suggesting that sibling relationships are more important than parental relationships?
8. Lady Catherine DeBourgh’s accusations and demands regarding a possible union with Mr. Darcy ultimately assure Elizabeth Bennett that there is yet hope. Why is this master stroke of dramatic irony so satisfying for readers? How are the roots of this irony are sown throughout the novel?

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9. 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."
  - “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.”
    - What does the line imply about women’s role in society and in marriage?
    - Whose opinion do you think this is?
  - How do the established marriages in the book fulfill these purposes? Consider:
    - Mr. and Mrs. Bennett
    - The Hursts
    - The Gardiners
  - How do the marriages that occur in the book achieve these various functions?
    - Do you think Jane Austen is offering a critique of marrying for social and financial considerations the marriages of Mr. Collins to Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Wickham to Lydia Bennett?
    - Are the happy marriages of Jane and Elizabeth Bennett, who marry “up,” favorable by the terms of the society? Do these happy and advantageous marriages undermine any critique the book offers?
10. Do the coincidences in the novel seem forced or do they support Austen’s preference for realistic plots? Do the the characters in the novel have free will or are they guided by chance?