

Plot Summary:

Pride and Prejudice is an 1813 novel of manners by Jane Austen. The novel follows the character development of Elizabeth Bennet, the dynamic protagonist of the book who learns about the repercussions of hasty judgments and comes to appreciate the difference between superficial goodness and actual goodness.

Mr. Bennet, owner of the Longbourn estate in Hertfordshire, has five daughters, but his property is entailed and can only be passed to a male heir. His wife also lacks an inheritance, so his family faces becoming poor upon his death. Thus, it is imperative that at least one of the daughters marries well to support the others, which is a motivation that drives the plot.

Pride and Prejudice has consistently appeared near the top of lists of "most-loved books" among literary scholars and the reading public. It has become one of the most popular novels in English literature, with over 20 million copies sold, and has inspired many derivatives in modern literature. For more than a century, dramatic adaptations, reprints, unofficial sequels, films, and TV versions of *Pride and Prejudice* have portrayed the memorable characters and themes of the novel, reaching mass audiences

The plot of *Pride and Prejudice* follows a linear, chronological structure. Elizabeth Bennet is the protagonist, and the major conflict revolves around her struggle to find a compatible husband despite the obstacles presented by both social conventions and her own lack of self-awareness. She encounters a number of antagonists who create obstacles between her and a happy marriage. These antagonists can be classified into two groups. The first are the characters who threaten Elizabeth's future happiness by trying to persuade her to marry the wrong man. They include Mrs. Bennet (who does not understand the kind of marriage her daughter wants and thinks Elizabeth should lower her standards) and Mr. Collins (who tries to convince Elizabeth to accept a marriage that would never satisfy her). The second group of antagonists are the characters who try to prevent Elizabeth's marriage to Darcy, notably Miss Bingley and Lady Catherine de Bourgh. There are times when Elizabeth functions as her own antagonist. Her stubbornness and inability to understand that Darcy would be a good match for her move her further away from her goal of happiness, rather than toward it.

The main plot of Elizabeth's path to marriage intersects closely with subplots focused on the love lives of other female characters. The plot structure is also shaped by its division into volumes. *Pride and Prejudice* was initially published in three volumes. In the first volume, the initial events of the plot focus on Jane's attraction to Bingley, with Elizabeth's interactions with Darcy and his gradual attraction to her functioning as secondary incidents. The major conflict in this first section of the novel centers on whether Jane and Bingley will be able to marry, since Darcy and Bingley's sisters seem determined to keep them apart. Another conflict arises when Mr. Collins begins pursuing Elizabeth, and she is forced to reject him. These two initial conflicts are given some resolution at the end of the first volume, when Mr. Collins finally accepts defeat and marries Charlotte Lucas, and the Bingley family leaves Netherfield to return to London. This moment in the plot marks a low point, as it appears as though neither Bennet sister has much chance of getting married and that most people marry for money and status.

The plot rises again with a new focus on the possibility of a match between Elizabeth and Darcy. Elizabeth's visit to Charlotte and Mr. Collins creates a new opportunity for her to interact with Mr. Darcy, leading him to propose to her. This proposal occurs approximately in the middle of the story and represents the climax of the attraction Darcy has been trying to resist ever since he first met Elizabeth. Her rejection of his proposal parallels her previous rejection of Mr. Collins. At this point, Elizabeth believes that Darcy is a bad person, and she will not accept a marriage to a man she does not love, no matter what he might offer her. However, the plotline of Darcy and Elizabeth's relationship increases in intensity after she rejects him. The rejected proposal leads him to reveal new information that makes her question her perception of him. The unfolding plot of growing affection between Darcy and Elizabeth is interrupted by a new conflict: Lydia's elopement. This conflict dominates the novel's plot until its resolution.

Once Lydia's plotline is resolved with her respectable marriage, the focus shifts to a return to Jane's storyline. Reunited with Bingley, she quickly becomes engaged, resolving the conflict that has been ongoing since the novel's start. All that remains is a final conflict to be overcome in the form of Lady de Bourgh's attempt to prevent Elizabeth from marrying Darcy. The earlier plot events where Elizabeth stood her ground have prepared her for this moment, and she refuses to back down. With the characters having finally overcome all the obstacles in their way, the novel's climax takes place when Darcy proposes a second time and Elizabeth accepts him. The climax is followed by some brief falling action, including the preparations for the marriage and the projected futures for all three couples.

Pride and Prejudice was influential in demonstrating that everyday events and domestic struggles presented in a realistic way can be as interesting as more sensational stories. Readers experience the events of the plot in the same way the characters do, without any special narrative techniques. This choice of plot structure helps to make the events of the novel relatable. The novel closes with a classic comedic ending in which three of the Bennet sisters are married and the virtuous characters (Jane, Elizabeth, Bingley, and Darcy) are rewarded with prosperity and happiness, while the foolish or wicked characters (Lydia and Wickham) face a more turbulent existence.

In the early 19th century, the Bennet family live at their Longbourn estate, situated near the village of Meryton in Hertfordshire, England. Mrs. Bennet's greatest desire is to marry off her five daughters in order to secure their futures. The arrival of Mr. Bingley, a rich bachelor who rents the neighbouring Netherfield estate, gives her hope that one of her daughters might contract an advantageous marriage, because "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife".

At a ball, the family is introduced to the Netherfield party, including Mr. Bingley, his two sisters and Mr. Darcy, his dearest friend. Mr. Bingley's friendly and cheerful manner earns him popularity among the guests. He appears interested in Jane, the eldest Bennet daughter. Mr. Darcy, reputed to be twice as wealthy as Mr. Bingley, is haughty and aloof, causing a decided dislike of him. He declines to dance with Elizabeth, the second-eldest Bennet daughter, as she is "not handsome enough". Although she jokes about it with her friend, Elizabeth is deeply offended. Despite this first impression, Mr. Darcy secretly begins to find himself drawn to Elizabeth as they continue to encounter each other at social events, appreciating her wit and frankness.

Mr. Collins, the heir to the Longbourn estate, visits the Bennet family with the intention of finding a wife among the five girls under the advice of his patroness Lady Catherine de Bourgh, also revealed to be Mr. Darcy's aunt. He decides to pursue Elizabeth. The Bennet family meet the charming army officer George Wickham, who tells Elizabeth in confidence Mr. Darcy's horrible past actions in his regards. Elizabeth, blinded by her prejudice toward Mr. Darcy, believes him.

Elizabeth dances with Mr. Darcy at a ball, where Mrs. Bennet hints loudly that she expects Jane and Bingley to become engaged. Elizabeth rejects Mr. Collins' marriage proposal, to her mother's fury and her father's relief. Mr. Collins instead proposes to Charlotte Lucas, a friend of Elizabeth. Having heard Mrs. Bennet's words at the ball and disapproving of the marriage, Mr. Darcy joins Mr. Bingley in a trip to London and, with the help of his sisters, convinces him not to return to Netherfield. A heartbroken Jane visits her Aunt and Uncle Gardiner in London to raise her spirits, while Elizabeth's hatred for Mr. Darcy grows as she suspects he was responsible for Mr. Bingley's departure.

In the spring, Elizabeth visits Charlotte and Mr. Collins in Kent. Elizabeth and her hosts are invited to Rosings Park, Lady Catherine's home. Mr. Darcy and his cousin, Colonel Fitzwilliam, are also visiting Rosings Park. Fitzwilliam tells Elizabeth how Mr. Darcy recently saved a friend, presumably Bingley, from an undesirable match. Elizabeth realises that the prevented engagement was to Jane. Mr. Darcy proposes to Elizabeth, declaring his love for her despite her low social connections. She is shocked, as she was unaware of Mr. Darcy's interest, and rejects him angrily, saying that he is the last person she would ever marry and that she could never love a man who caused her sister such unhappiness; she further accuses him of treating Wickham

unjustly. Mr. Darcy brags about his success in separating Bingley and Jane and sarcastically dismisses the accusation regarding Wickham without addressing it.

Mr. Darcy gives Elizabeth a letter, explaining that Wickham, the son of his late father's steward, had refused the "living" his father had arranged for him and was instead given money for it. Wickham quickly squandered the money and tried to elope with Darcy's 15-year-old sister, Georgiana, for her considerable dowry. Mr. Darcy also writes that he separated Jane and Bingley because he believed her indifferent to Bingley and because of the lack of propriety displayed by her family. Elizabeth is ashamed by her family's behaviour and her own prejudice against Mr. Darcy.

Months later, Elizabeth accompanies the Gardiners on a tour of Derbyshire. They visit Pemberley, Darcy's estate. When Mr. Darcy returns unexpectedly, he is exceedingly gracious with Elizabeth and the Gardiners. Elizabeth is surprised by Darcy's behaviour and grows fond of him, even coming to regret rejecting his proposal. She receives news that her sister Lydia has run off with Wickham. She tells Mr. Darcy, then departs in haste. After an agonising interim, Wickham agrees to marry Lydia. She visits the family and tells Elizabeth that Mr. Darcy was at her wedding. Though Mr. Darcy had sworn everyone involved to secrecy, Mrs. Gardiner now feels obliged to inform Elizabeth that he secured the match, at great expense and trouble to himself.

Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy return to Netherfield. Jane accepts Mr. Bingley's proposal. Lady Catherine, having heard rumours that Elizabeth intends to marry Mr. Darcy, visits her and demands she promise never to accept Mr. Darcy's proposal, as she and Darcy's late mother had already planned his marriage to her daughter Anne. Elizabeth refuses and asks the outraged Lady Catherine to leave. Darcy, heartened by his aunt's indignant relaying of Elizabeth's response, again proposes to her and is accepted.

Style

Pride and Prejudice, like most of Austen's works, employs the narrative technique of free indirect speech, which has been defined as "the free representation of a character's speech, by which one means, not words actually spoken by a character, but the words that typify the character's thoughts, or the way the character would think or speak, if she thought or spoke. Austen creates her characters with fully developed personalities and unique voices. Though Darcy and Elizabeth are very alike, they are also considerably different. By using narrative that adopts the tone and vocabulary of a particular character (in this case, Elizabeth), Austen invites the reader to follow events from Elizabeth's viewpoint, sharing her prejudices and misapprehensions. "The learning curve, while undergone by both protagonists, is disclosed to us solely through Elizabeth's point of view and her free indirect speech is essential ... for it is through it that we remain caught, if not stuck, within Elizabeth's misperceptions. The few times the reader is allowed to gain further knowledge of another character's feelings, is through the letters exchanged in this novel. Darcy's first letter to Elizabeth is an example of this as through his letter, the reader and Elizabeth are both given knowledge of Wickham's true character. Austen is known to use irony throughout the novel especially from viewpoint of the character of Elizabeth Bennet. She conveys the "oppressive rules of femininity that actually dominate her life and work, and are covered by her beautifully carved trojan horse of ironic distance. Beginning with a historical investigation of the development of a particular literary form and then transitioning into empirical verifications, it reveals free indirect discourse as a tool that emerged over time as practical means for addressing the physical distinctness of minds. Seen in this way, free indirect discourse is a distinctly literary response to an environmental concern, providing a scientific justification that does not reduce literature to a mechanical extension of biology, but takes its value to be its own original form.

Main Characters.

Elizabeth Bennet

The novel's protagonist. The second daughter of Mr. Bennet, Elizabeth is the most intelligent and sensible of the five Bennet sisters. She is well read and quick-witted, with a tongue that occasionally proves too sharp for her own good. Her realization of Darcy's essential goodness eventually triumphs over her initial prejudice against him.

The second daughter in the Bennet family, and the most intelligent and quick-witted, Elizabeth is the protagonist of *Pride and Prejudice* and one of the most well-known female characters in English literature. Her admirable qualities are numerous—she is lovely, clever, and, in a novel defined by dialogue, she converses as brilliantly as anyone. Her honesty, virtue, and lively wit enable her to rise above the nonsense and bad behavior that pervade her class-bound and often spiteful society.

Nevertheless, her sharp tongue and tendency to make hasty judgments often lead her astray; *Pride and Prejudice* is essentially the story of how she (and her true love, Darcy) overcome all obstacles—including their own personal failings—to find romantic happiness. Elizabeth must not only cope with a hopeless mother, a distant father, two badly behaved younger siblings, and several snobbish, antagonizing females, she must also overcome her own mistaken impressions of Darcy, which initially lead her to reject his proposals of marriage. Her charms are sufficient to keep him interested, fortunately, while she navigates familial and social turmoil. As she gradually comes to recognize the nobility of Darcy's character, she realizes the error of her initial prejudice against him.

Fitzwilliam Darcy

A wealthy gentleman, the master of Pemberley, and the nephew of Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Though Darcy is intelligent and honest, his excess of pride causes him to look down on his social inferiors. Over the course of the novel, he tempers his class-consciousness and learns to admire and love Elizabeth for her strong character.

The son of a wealthy, well-established family and the master of the great estate of Pemberley, Darcy is Elizabeth's male counterpart. The narrator relates Elizabeth's point of view of events more often than Darcy's, so Elizabeth often seems a more sympathetic figure. The reader eventually realizes, however, that Darcy is her ideal match. Intelligent and forthright, he too has a tendency to judge too hastily and harshly, and his high birth and wealth make him overly proud and overly conscious of his social status. Indeed, his haughtiness makes him initially bungle his courtship. When he proposes to her, for instance, he dwells more on how unsuitable a match she is than on her charms, beauty, or anything else complimentary.

Elizabeth's rejection of his advances builds a kind of humility in Darcy. Darcy demonstrates his continued devotion to Elizabeth, in spite of his distaste for her low connections, when he rescues Lydia and the entire Bennet family from disgrace, and when he goes against the wishes of his haughty aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, by continuing to pursue Elizabeth. Darcy proves himself worthy of Elizabeth, and she ends up repenting her earlier, overly harsh judgment of him.

Jane Bennet

The eldest and most beautiful Bennet sister. Jane is more reserved and gentler than Elizabeth. The easy pleasantness with which she and Bingley interact contrasts starkly with the mutual distaste that marks the encounters between Elizabeth and Darcy.

Charles Bingley Character Analysis

Elizabeth's beautiful elder sister and Darcy's wealthy best friend, Jane and Bingley engage in a courtship that occupies a central place in the novel. They first meet at the ball in Meryton and enjoy an immediate mutual

attraction. They are spoken of as a potential couple throughout the book, long before anyone imagines that Darcy and Elizabeth might marry.

Despite their centrality to the narrative, Jane and Bingley are vague characters, sketched by Austen rather than carefully drawn. Indeed, they are so similar in nature and behavior that they can be described together: both are cheerful, friendly, and good-natured, always ready to think the best of others; they lack entirely the prickly egotism of Elizabeth and Darcy. Jane's gentle spirit serves as a foil for her sister's fiery, contentious nature, while Bingley's eager friendliness contrasts with Darcy's stiff pride. Their principal characteristics are goodwill and compatibility, and the contrast of their romance with that of Darcy and Elizabeth is remarkable. Jane and Bingley exhibit to the reader true love unhampered by either pride or prejudice, though in their simple goodness, they also demonstrate that such a love is mildly dull.

Charles Bingley

Darcy's considerably wealthy best friend. Bingley's purchase of Netherfield, an estate near the Bennets, serves as the impetus for the novel. He is a genial, well-intentioned gentleman, whose easygoing nature contrasts with Darcy's initially discourteous demeanor. He is blissfully uncaring about class differences.

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Mr. Bennet

The patriarch of the Bennet family, a gentleman of modest income with five unmarried daughters. Mr. Bennet has a sarcastic, cynical sense of humor that he uses to purposefully irritate his wife. Though he loves his daughters (Elizabeth in particular), he often fails as a parent, preferring to withdraw from the never-ending marriage concerns of the women around him rather than offer help.

Mr. Bennet is the patriarch of the Bennet household—the husband of Mrs. Bennet and the father of Jane, Elizabeth, Lydia, Kitty, and Mary. He is a man driven to exasperation by his ridiculous wife and difficult daughters. He reacts by withdrawing from his family and assuming a detached attitude punctuated by bursts of sarcastic humor. He is closest to Elizabeth because they are the two most intelligent Bennets.

Initially, his dry wit and self-possession in the face of his wife's hysteria make Mr. Bennet a sympathetic figure, but, though he remains likable throughout, the reader gradually loses respect for him as it becomes clear that the price of his detachment is considerable. He is in fact a weak father who, at critical moments, fails his family. In particular, his foolish indulgence of Lydia's immature behavior nearly leads to general disgrace when she elopes with Wickham. Further, upon her disappearance, he proves largely ineffective. It is left to Mr. Gardiner and Darcy to track Lydia down and rectify the situation. Ultimately, Mr. Bennet would rather withdraw from the world than cope with it.

Mrs. Bennet

Mr. Bennet's wife, a foolish, noisy woman whose only goal in life is to see her daughters married. Because of her low breeding and often unbecoming behavior, Mrs. Bennet often repels the very suitors whom she tries to attract for her daughters.

Mrs. Bennet is a miraculously tiresome character. Noisy and foolish, she is a woman consumed by the desire to see her daughters married and seems to care for nothing else in the world. Ironically, her single-minded pursuit of this goal tends to backfire, as her lack of social graces alienates the very people (Darcy and Bingley) whom she tries desperately to attract. Austen uses her continually to highlight the necessity of marriage for young women. Mrs. Bennet also serves as a middle-class counterpoint to such upper-class snobs as Lady Catherine and Miss Bingley, demonstrating that foolishness can be found at every level of society. In the end, however, Mrs. Bennet proves such an unattractive figure, lacking redeeming characteristics of any kind, that some readers have accused Austen of unfairness in portraying her—as if Austen, like Mr. Bennet, took perverse pleasure in poking fun at a woman already scorned as a result of her ill-breeding.

George Wickham

A handsome, fortune-hunting militia officer. Wickham's good looks and charm attract Elizabeth initially, but Darcy's revelation about Wickham's disreputable past clues her in to his true nature and simultaneously draws her closer to Darcy.

Lydia Bennet

The youngest Bennet sister, she is gossipy, immature, and self-involved. Unlike Elizabeth, Lydia flings herself headlong into romance and ends up running off with Wickham.

Lydia is the youngest and wildest Bennet daughter. She is her mother's favorite because like Mrs. Bennet, she is preoccupied with gossip, socializing, and men. Lydia is described as having "high animal spirits and a sort of natural self-consequence." She is attractive and charismatic, but she is also reckless and impulsive. Lydia's behavior frequently embarrasses her older sisters, and when Lydia receives the invitation to go to Brighton, Lizzy makes an impassioned speech about her sister's character. She explains that "our respectability in the world must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Lydia's character" Lizzy also articulates her fear that Lydia is on the road to becoming "a flirt in the worst and meanest degree of flirtation." Lydia has an innate tendency toward wild and selfish behavior, but as a character she also sheds light on the failings of her parents, and father in particular. Because of her young age and lack of education, Lydia is presented as not entirely culpable for her behavior because she lacks parental guidance and discipline.

Mr. Collins

A pompous, generally idiotic clergyman who stands to inherit Mr. Bennet's property. Mr. Collins's own social status is nothing to brag about, but he takes great pains to let everyone and anyone know that Lady Catherine de Bourgh serves as his patroness. He is the worst combination of snobbish and obsequious.

Miss Bingley

Bingley's snobbish sister. Miss Bingley bears inordinate disdain for Elizabeth's middle-class background. Her vain attempts to garner Darcy's attention cause Darcy to admire Elizabeth's self-possessed character even more.

Lady Catherine de Bourgh

A rich, bossy noblewoman; Mr. Collins's patron and Darcy's aunt. Lady Catherine epitomizes class snobbery, especially in her attempts to order the middle-class Elizabeth away from her well-bred nephew.

Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner

Mrs. Bennet's brother and his wife. The Gardiners, caring, nurturing, and full of common sense, often prove to be better parents to the Bennet daughters than Mr. Bennet and his wife.

Charlotte Lucas

Elizabeth's dear friend. Pragmatic where Elizabeth is romantic, and also six years older than Elizabeth, Charlotte does not view love as the most vital component of a marriage. She is more interested in having a comfortable home. Thus, when Mr. Collins proposes, she accepts.

Charlotte is initially described as "a sensible, intelligent woman... who was Elizabeth's intimate friend." Because of this intelligence, Elizabeth assumes that Charlotte shares her values, even though Charlotte is actually much more pragmatic and even cynical. For example, after Charlotte makes a series of speeches explaining that "Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance" and highlighting the importance of choosing a partner who can provide economic stability, Elizabeth gently rebukes her, explaining that "You know it is not sound and you would never behave in this way yourself." Because Elizabeth is blind to Charlotte's true values, she feels shocked and betrayed when Charlotte chooses to marry Mr. Collins. Charlotte's character is consistent throughout; when Elizabeth goes to visit her after her marriage, she is forced to "meditate upon Charlotte's degree of contentment... and to acknowledge that it was all done very well." Charlotte accurately assesses her priorities and what she needs to be happy, and chooses accordingly. As a result, she stands in contrast to Elizabeth, who often forms inaccurate assessments of situations and people.

Georgiana Darcy

Darcy's sister. She is immensely pretty and just as shy. She has great skill at playing the pianoforte.

Mary Bennet

The middle Bennet sister, bookish and pedantic.

Catherine Bennet

The fourth Bennet sister. Like Lydia, she is girlishly enthralled with the soldiers.

Summary:

The news that a wealthy young gentleman named Charles Bingley has rented the manor known as Netherfield Park causes a great stir in the neighboring village of Longbourn, especially in the Bennet household. The Bennets have five unmarried daughters, and Mrs. Bennet, a foolish and fussy gossip, is the sort who agrees with the novel's opening words: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." She sees Bingley's arrival as an opportunity for one of the girls to obtain a wealthy spouse, and she, therefore, insists that her husband call on the new arrival immediately. Mr. Bennet torments his family by pretending to have no interest in doing so, but he eventually meets with Mr. Bingley without their knowing. When he reveals to Mrs. Bennet and his daughters that he has made their new neighbor's acquaintance, they are overjoyed and excited.

Eager to learn more, Mrs. Bennet and the girls question Mr. Bennet incessantly. A few days later, Mr. Bingley returns the visit, though he does not meet Mr. Bennet's daughters. The Bennets invite him to dinner shortly afterward, but he is called away to London. Soon, however, he returns to Netherfield Park with his two sisters, his brother-in-law, and a friend named Darcy.

Mr. Bingley and his guests go to a ball in the nearby town of Meryton. The Bennet sisters attend the ball with their mother. The eldest daughter, Jane, dances twice with Bingley. Within her sister Elizabeth's hearing, Bingley exclaims to Darcy that Jane is "the most beautiful creature" he has ever beheld. Bingley suggests that Darcy dance with Elizabeth, but Darcy refuses, saying, "she is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me." He proceeds to declare that he has no interest in women who are "slighted by other men." Elizabeth takes an immediate and understandable disliking to Darcy. Because of Darcy's comments and refusal to dance with anyone not rich and well-bred, the neighborhood takes a similar dislike; it declares Bingley, on the other hand, to be quite "amiable."

At the end of the evening, the Bennet women return to their house, where Mrs. Bennet regales her husband with stories from the evening until he insists that she be silent. Upstairs, Jane relates to Elizabeth her surprise that Bingley danced with her twice, and Elizabeth replies that Jane is unaware of her own beauty. Both girls agree that Bingley's sisters are not well-mannered, but whereas Jane insists that they are charming in close conversation, Elizabeth continues to harbor a dislike for them.

The narrator then provides the reader with Bingley's background: he inherited a hundred thousand pounds from his father, but for now, in spite of his sisters' complaints, he lives as a tenant. His friendship with Darcy is "steady," despite the contrast in their characters, illustrated in their respective reactions to the Meryton ball. Bingley, cheerful and sociable, has an excellent time and is taken with Jane; Darcy, more clever but less tactful, finds the people dull and even criticizes Jane for smiling too often (Bingley's sisters, on the other hand, find Jane to be "a sweet girl," and Bingley therefore feels secure in his good opinion of her).

Analysis: Chapters 1–4

The opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*—"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife"—establishes the centrality of an advantageous marriage, a fundamental social value of Regency England. The arrival of Mr. Bingley (and news of his fortune) is the event that sets the novel in motion. He delivers the prospect of a marriage of wealth and good connections for the eager Bennet girls. The opening sentence has a subtle, unstated significance. In its declarative and hopeful claim that a wealthy man must be looking for a wife, it hides beneath its surface the truth of such matters: a single woman must be in want of a husband, especially a wealthy one.

The first chapter consists almost entirely of dialogue, a typical instance of Austen's technique of using the manner in which characters express themselves to reveal their traits and attitudes. Its last paragraph, in which the narrator describes Mr. Bennet as a "mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice," and his wife as "a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper," simply confirms the character assessments that the reader has already made based on their conversation: Mrs. Bennett embodies

ill-breeding and is prone to monotone hysteria; Mr. Bennet is a wit who retreats from his wife's overly serious demeanor. There is little physical description of the characters in *Pride and Prejudice*, so the reader's perception of them is shaped largely by their words. Darcy makes the importance of the verbal explicit at the end of the novel when he tells Elizabeth that he was first attracted to her by "the liveliness of [her] mind."

The ball at Meryton is important to the structure of the novel since it brings the two couples—Darcy and Elizabeth, Bingley and Jane—together for the first time. Austen's original title for the novel was *First Impressions*, and these individuals' first impressions at the ball initiate the contrasting patterns of the two principal male-female relationships. The relative effortlessness with which Bingley and Jane interact is indicative of their easygoing natures; the obstacles that the novel places in the way of their happiness are in no way caused by Jane or Bingley themselves. Indeed, their feelings for one another seem to change little after the initial attraction—there is no development of their love, only the delay of its consummation. Darcy's bad behavior, on the other hand, immediately betrays the pride and sense of social superiority that will most hinder him from finding his way to Elizabeth. His snub of her creates a mutual dislike, in contrast to the mutual attraction between Jane and Bingley. Further, while Darcy's opinion of Elizabeth changes within a few chapters, her (and the reader's) sense of him as self-important and arrogant remains unaltered until midway through the novel.

The Bennets' neighbors are Sir William Lucas, his wife, and their children. The eldest of these children, Charlotte, is Elizabeth's closest friend. The morning after the ball, the women of the two families discuss the evening. They decide that while Bingley danced with Charlotte first, he considered Jane to be the prettiest of the local girls. The discussion then turns to Mr. Darcy, and Elizabeth states that she will never dance with him; everyone agrees that Darcy, despite his family and fortune, is too proud to be likable.

Bingley's sisters exchange visits with the Bennets and attempt to befriend Elizabeth and Jane. Meanwhile, Bingley continues to pay attention to Jane, and Elizabeth decides that her sister is "in a way to be very much in love" with him but is concealing it very well. She discusses this with Charlotte Lucas, who comments that if Jane conceals it too well, Bingley may lose interest. Elizabeth says it is better for a young woman to be patient until she is sure of her feelings; Charlotte disagrees, saying that it is best not to know too much about the faults of one's future husband.

Darcy finds himself attracted to Elizabeth. He begins listening to her conversations at parties, much to her surprise. At one party at the Lucas house, Sir William attempts to persuade Elizabeth and Darcy to dance together, but Elizabeth refuses. Shortly afterward, Darcy tells Bingley's unmarried sister that "Miss Elizabeth Bennet" is now the object of his admiration.

The reader learns that Mr. Bennet's property is entailed, meaning that it must pass to a man after Mr. Bennet's death and cannot be inherited by any of his daughters. His two youngest children, Catherine (nicknamed Kitty) and Lydia, entertain themselves by beginning a series of visits to their mother's sister, Mrs. Phillips, in the town of Meryton, and gossiping about the militia stationed there.

One night, while the Bennets are discussing the soldiers over dinner, a note arrives inviting Jane to Netherfield Park for a day. Mrs. Bennet conspires to send Jane by horse rather than coach, knowing that it will rain and that Jane will consequently have to spend the night at Mr. Bingley's house. Unfortunately, their plan works out too well: Jane is soaked, falls ill, and is forced to remain at Netherfield as an invalid. Elizabeth goes to visit her, hiking over on foot. When she arrives with soaked and dirty stockings she causes quite a stir and is certain that the Bingleys hold her in contempt for her soiled clothes. Jane insists that her sister spend the night and the Bingleys consent.

That night, while Elizabeth visits Jane, the Bingley sisters poke fun at the Bennets. Darcy and Mr. Bingley defend them, though Darcy concedes, first, that he would not want his sister ever to go out on such a walking expedition and, second, that the Bennets' lack of wealth and family make them poor marriage prospects. When Elizabeth returns to the room, the discussion turns to Darcy's library at his ancestral home of Pemberley and then to Darcy's opinions on what constitutes an "accomplished woman." After he and Bingley

list the attributes that such a woman would possess, Elizabeth declares that she “never saw such capacity, and taste, and application, and elegance, as you describe, united,” implying that Darcy is far too demanding.

Analysis: Chapters 5–8

The introduction of the Lucases allows Austen to comment on the pretensions that accompany social rank. Recently knighted, Sir William is described as having felt his new distinction “a little too strongly” and moved away from town in order to “think with pleasure of his own importance.” Sir William remains a sympathetic figure despite his snobbery, but the same cannot be said of Bingley’s sister, whose class-consciousness becomes increasingly evident. Awareness of class difference is a pressing reality in *Pride and Prejudice*. This awareness colors the attitudes that characters of different social status feel toward one another. This awareness cuts both ways: as Darcy and Elizabeth demonstrate, the well-born and the socially inferior prove equally likely to harbor prejudices that blind them to others’ true natures.

Charlotte Lucas’s observation that Jane does not display her affection for Bingley illuminates the careful structure of the novel. Darcy notices the same reticence in Jane, but he assumes that she is not in love with Bingley. Charlotte’s conversation with Elizabeth, then, foreshadows Darcy’s justification for separating Bingley from Jane. Similarly, the author prepares the reader for subsequent developments in other relationships: Charlotte’s belief that it is better not to know one’s husband too well foreshadows her “practical” marriage to Collins, while Elizabeth’s more romantic view anticipates her refusal of two proposals that might have been accepted by others.

As in *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen emphasizes the matter of entailment in order to create a sense of urgency about the search for a husband. Though Jane is the eldest child in a fairly well-off family, her status as a woman precludes her from enjoying the success her father has experienced. When her father dies, the estate will turn over to Mr. Collins, the oldest male relative. The mention of entailment stresses not just the value society places on making a good marriage but also the way that the structures of society make a good marriage a prerequisite for a “good” life (the connotation of “good” being wealthy). Austen thus offers commentary on the plight of women. Through both law and prescribed gender roles, Austen’s society leaves women few options for the advancement or betterment of their situations.

Language proves of central importance to relationships in *Pride and Prejudice*, as Austen uses conversation to reveal character. The interactions between Darcy and Elizabeth primarily take the forms of banter and argument, and Elizabeth’s words provide Darcy access to a deeper aspect of her character, one that appeals to him and allows him to begin to move past his initial prejudice. While their disagreement over the possibility of a “perfect” woman reinforces his apparent egotism and self-absorption, it also gives Elizabeth a chance to shine in debate. Whereas she does not live up to Darcy’s physical and social requirements for a perfect woman, she exceeds those concerning the “liveliness” of the perfect woman’s mind.

The novel begins to undermine the reader’s negative impression of Darcy by contrasting him with Miss Bingley. Though his arrogance remains unpleasant, he is unwilling to join in Miss Bingley’s snobbish dismissals of Elizabeth and her family. Like Lady Catherine de Bourgh later on, Miss Bingley serves as the voice of “society,” criticizing Elizabeth’s middle-class status and lack of social connections. Also like Lady Catherine, her primary motivation is jealousy: just as Lady Catherine wants Darcy to marry her niece, Miss Bingley wants him for herself. Both women exhibit spite colored by self-interest.

Themes in Pride and Prejudice

Here's a list of **major Pride and Prejudice themes**.

- Overcoming obstacles for true love
- A woman's reputation
- Social class, class distinction, class status
- The strength of family networks
- Integrity and behavior

Overcoming Obstacles For True Love

Overcoming obstacles for true love – At its heart, *Pride and Prejudice* is a love story in which the characters have to fight through trials and tribulations before they can come together in happiness. Elizabeth and Darcy are a classic couple, but they could not reach their point of bliss until each character worked hard in order to overcome personal biases and flaws. This theme helps to show how self-improvement can lead to fulfilling romantic partnerships. As the title suggests, Elizabeth must overcome her prejudices and Darcy must fight away his prideful nature in order for a happy union to result. Throughout the process, they meet each other head-on to encourage these changes.

Other obstacles that stand to threaten Elizabeth and Darcy include many of the other characters. Mrs. Bennet tries to force Elizabeth to marry Mr. Collins, a man who she finds snobbish and dull. Lady de Bourgh is Darcy's aunt and she wants to preserve her family's social status. She sees Darcy's engagement to Elizabeth as damaging to his social reputation and tries to break the couple up. Similarly, Miss Bingley is jealous of Elizabeth and sees herself as a more suited match for Mr. Darcy seeing as they are of a more similar economic class. Finally, Wickham poses as an obstacle to Elizabeth and Darcy being together as he lies about Darcy's past in order to paint him in a negative light. This nearly works until Elizabeth learns that Wickham was actually the bad guy all along.

A Woman's Reputation

A woman's reputation – In a story that revolves heavily around how reputation affects people's lives, there is a particular focus on how a woman must present herself to the world. Elizabeth refuses to adhere to societal norms for women. For example, she allows her shoes and skirts to become muddy, she has a sharp tongue that is seen as unbecoming for a young lady, and she refuses to marry for any reason other than actual love.

Elizabeth's offenses against femininity are mild, however, compared to her younger sister Lydia's actions. Lydia runs away with the dreadful Wickham and lives with him out of wedlock. When this threatens to ruin the entire Bennet family's reputation, Elizabeth fights to make the situation right. It seems that she has grown too much just to risk watching it all come crashing down because of a judgmental society and her sister's ill-planned actions. So while Elizabeth certainly pushes boundaries, she knows when to take a calculated step back.

The Strength of Family Networks

The strength of family networks – Each character of the novel has a network of family that serves to either help or hinder any given character's growth. Family opinions seem to mean a lot to most characters in some way or another and this impacts how everyone interacts both in social settings and in more personal dynamics. The Bennet sisters are very close, particularly Jane and Elizabeth and they encourage and support one another. Even when Lydia behaves foolishly and runs off with Wickham, Elizabeth rushes to her aid. Female family members in particular tend to carry a lot of weight. Mrs. Bennet, Miss Bingley and Lady de Bourgh all behave out of self-interest and raise quite the stink when something happens that they don't like. This serves to complicate things on many occasions and results in the understanding from several of the more major characters that they should depend on themselves above anyone.

Integrity and Behavior

Integrity and behavior – The novel's main characters have strong integrity and throughout the events of the story they learn how to manage their disappointments in other people. Elizabeth, for example, is repeatedly disappointed at the way other people behave and she struggles to reconcile her own integrity against other characters' acts of self-interest. Elizabeth upholds her integrity by refusing to marry anyone who she doesn't love. In the end, she is rewarded for this by getting to marry for love and she gains great wealth in this union.

Marriage[

The opening line of the novel famously announces: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. This sets marriage as a motif and a problem in the novel. Readers are poised to question whether or not these single men need a wife, or if the need is dictated by the "neighbourhood" families and their daughters who require a "good fortune".

Marriage is a complex social activity that takes political and financial economy into account. In the case of Charlotte Lucas, the seeming success of her marriage lies in the comfortable financial circumstances of their household, while the relationship between Mr and Mrs Bennet serves to illustrate bad marriages based on an initial attraction and surface over substance (economic and psychological). The Bennets' marriage is an example that the youngest Bennet, Lydia, re-enacts with Wickham and the results are far from felicitous. Although the central characters, Elizabeth and Darcy, begin the novel as hostile acquaintances and unlikely friends, they eventually work toward a better understanding of themselves and each other, which frees them to truly fall in love. This does not eliminate the challenges of the real differences in their technically-equivalent social status as gentry and their female relations. It does however provide them with a better understanding of each other's point of view from the different ends of the rather wide scale of differences within that category.

When Elizabeth rejects Darcy's first proposal, the argument of marrying for love is introduced. Elizabeth only accepts Darcy's proposal when she is certain she loves him and her feelings are reciprocated.^[17] Austen's complex sketching of different marriages ultimately allows readers to question what forms of alliance are desirable especially when it comes to privileging economic, sexual, companionate attraction.^[18]

Wealth[

Money plays a fundamental role in the marriage market, for the young ladies seeking a well-off husband and for men who wish to marry a woman of means. George Wickham tries to elope with Georgiana Darcy, and Colonel Fitzwilliam states that he will marry someone with wealth. Marrying a woman of a rich family also ensured a linkage to a higher-class family, as is visible in the desires of Bingley's sisters to have their brother married to Georgiana Darcy. Mrs Bennet is frequently seen encouraging her daughters to marry a wealthy man of high social class. In chapter 1, when Mr Bingley arrives, she declares "I am thinking of his marrying one of them".¹

Inheritance was by descent but could be further restricted by entailment, which in the case of the Longbourn estate restricted inheritance to male heirs only. In the case of the Bennet family, Mr Collins was to inherit the family estate upon Mr Bennet's death in the absence of any closer male heirs, and his proposal to Elizabeth would have ensured her security; but she refuses his offer. Inheritance laws benefited males because married women did not have independent legal rights until the second half of the 19th century. For the upper-middle and aristocratic classes, marriage to a man with a reliable income was almost the only route to security for the woman and the children she was to have.¹ The irony of the opening line is that generally within this society it would be a woman who would be looking for a wealthy husband to have a prosperous life.

Class

Austen might be known now for her "romances" but the marriages in her novels engage with economics and class distinction. *Pride and Prejudice* is hardly the exception. When Darcy proposes to Elizabeth, he cites their economic and social differences as an obstacle his excessive love has had to overcome, though he still anxiously harps on the problems it poses for him within his social circle. His aunt, Lady Catherine, later

characterises these differences in particularly harsh terms when she conveys what Elizabeth's marriage to Darcy will become, "Will the shades of Pemberley be thus polluted?" Although Elizabeth responds to Lady Catherine's accusations that hers is a potentially contaminating economic and social position (Elizabeth even insists she and Darcy, as gentleman's daughter and gentleman, are "equals"), Lady Catherine refuses to accept the possibility of Darcy's marriage to Elizabeth. However, as the novel closes, "...through curiosity to see how his wife conducted herself", Lady Catherine condescends to visit them at Pemberley.

The Bingleys present a particular problem for navigating class. Though Caroline Bingley and Mrs Hurst behave and speak of others as if they have always belonged in the upper echelons of society, Austen makes it clear that the Bingley fortunes stem from trade. The fact that Bingley rents Netherfield Hall – it is, after all, "to let" – distinguishes him significantly from Darcy, whose estate belonged to his father's family and through his mother, is the grandson and nephew of an earl. Bingley, unlike Darcy, does not own his property but has portable and growing wealth that makes him a good catch on the marriage market for poorer daughters of the gentry, like Jane Bennet, or of ambitious merchants. Class plays a central role in the evolution of the characters and Jane Austen's radical approach to class is seen as the plot unfolds.^[23]

An undercurrent of the old Anglo-Norman upper class is hinted at in the story, as suggested by the names of Fitzwilliam Darcy and his aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh; *Fitzwilliam*, *D'Arcy*, *de Bourgh* (*Burke*), and even *Bennet*, are traditional Norman surnames.

Self-knowledge[

Through their interactions and their critiques of each other, Darcy and Elizabeth come to recognise their faults and work to correct them. Elizabeth meditates on her own mistakes thoroughly in chapter 36:

"How despicably have I acted!" she cried; "I, who have prided myself on my discernment! I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity in useless or blameable distrust. How humiliating is this discovery! yet, how just a humiliation! Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly. Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment I never knew myself."^[25]

Other characters rarely exhibit this depth of understanding or at least are not given the space within the novel for this sort of development. Tanner writes that Mrs Bennet in particular, "has a very limited view of the requirements of that performance; lacking any introspective tendencies she is incapable of appreciating the feelings of others and is only aware of material objects".^[26] Mrs Bennet's behaviour reflects the society in which she lives, as she knows that her daughters will not succeed if they do not get married. "The business of her life was to get her daughters married: its solace was visiting and news."^[27] This shows that Mrs Bennet is only aware of "material objects" and not of her feelings and emotions.^[28] A notable exception is Charlotte Lucas, Elizabeth Bennet's close friend and confidant. She accepts Mr Collins's proposal of marriage once Lizzie rejects him, not out of sentiment but acute awareness of her circumstances as "one of a large family". Charlotte's decision is reflective of her prudent nature and awareness.

Important Questions :

1. Compare between Novel and Drama .
2. What are the types of Novel?
3. Explain the character of Elizabeth as the protagonist of Pride and Prejudice.
4. Show the significance of the opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*—"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife".
5. What are the elements of the novel?
6. Explain the character of Jane as the eldest daughter of the Bennet Family.
7. What are the themes of Pride and Prejudice , Explain one of them.
8. Talk briefly about the style of Pride and Prejudice .

1. Complete the quotation: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a ____."

- ☐ house
- ☐ title
- ☐ wife
- ☐ dog

2. The Bennet family lives in the village of ...

- ☐ Pemberley
- ☐ Longbourn
- ☐ Rosings
- ☐ London

3. Mr. Bingley, when he attends the ball in Meryton, seems to be quite taken with ...

- ☐ Elizabeth
- ☐ Jane
- ☐ Lydia
- ☐ Charlotte Lucas

4. How does Mr. Darcy offend Elizabeth at the first ball?

- ☐ He insults her father.
- ☐ He dances with Jane too often.
- ☐ He slaps her.
- ☐ He refuses to dance with her.

5. Elizabeth's best friend is named ...

- ☐ Mrs. Phillips
- ☐ Charlotte Lucas

- ☐ Miss Bingley
- ☐ Mrs. Gardiner

6. Why does Jane's visit to the Bingleys end up lasting for days?

- ☐ She gets soaked in a rainstorm and becomes ill.
- ☐ Mr. Bingley proposes to her.
- ☐ Mrs. Bennet forgets to send a carriage to bring her home.
- ☐ Jane is hoping to make Mr. Darcy fall in love with her.

7. What does it mean that Mr. Bennet's property is "entailed"?

- ☐ Lady Catherine de Bourgh gave it to him.
- ☐ It can only be inherited by a male.
- ☐ It comes from his wife's family.
- ☐ He rents from Sir William Lucas.

8. What reason does Wickham give Elizabeth for his dislike of Darcy?

- ☐ Darcy killed his cousin in a duel.
- ☐ Darcy wouldn't let Wickham marry his sister.
- ☐ Darcy betrayed his country.
- ☐ Darcy cheated him out of an inheritance.

9. To which Bennet daughter does Mr. Collins propose marriage?

- ☐ Elizabeth
- ☐ Jane
- ☐ Mary
- ☐ Lydia

10. Whom does Mr. Collins marry?

- ☐ Jane
- ☐ Lydia
- ☐ Miss Bingley
- ☐ Charlotte Lucas