

The proudest man in the world

from *Pride and Prejudice* Jane Austen, 1813

WARM UP

1 In *Pride and Prejudice* two people who are destined to love each other, initially dislike each other. This element has become a cliché in the Hollywood romance. Can you think of other examples?

A What are Mr Darcy's characteristics when he first enters the room?

B When does everyone change their minds about Mr Darcy?

C What particularly annoys Mrs Bennet about Mr Darcy?

Pride and Prejudice is Jane Austen's second novel. Its original title was *First Impressions*. The story is about five sisters – Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty and Lydia Bennet. Their lives change suddenly when a wealthy young man (Mr Bingley) and his best friend (Mr Darcy) arrive in their neighbourhood. Bingley meets Jane at a ball and he immediately likes her very much. On the same occasion, Darcy meets Elizabeth for the first time and is extremely rude to her.

Mr Bingley was good looking and gentlemanlike; he had a pleasant countenance, and easy, unaffected manners. [...] But his friend Mr Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien; and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year. The gentlemen pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man, the ladies declared he was much handsomer than Mr Bingley, and he was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased; and not all his large estate in Derbyshire could then save him from having a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance, and being unworthy to be compared with his friend.

Mr Bingley had soon made himself acquainted with all the principal people in the room; he was lively and unreserved, danced every dance, was angry that the ball closed so early, and talked of giving one himself at Netherfield. Such amiable qualities must speak for themselves. What a contrast between him and his friend! Mr Darcy danced only once with Mrs Hurst and once with Miss Bingley, declined being introduced to any other lady, and spent the rest of the evening in walking about the room, speaking occasionally to one of his own party. His character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world, and every body hoped that he would never come there again. Amongst the most violent against him was Mrs Bennet, whose dislike of his general behaviour was sharpened into particular resentment by his having slighted one of her daughters.

Elizabeth Bennet had been obliged, by the scarcity of gentlemen, to sit down for two dances; and during part of that time, Mr Darcy had been standing near enough for her to overhear a conversation between him and Mr Bingley, who came from the dance for a few minutes to press his friend to join it.

“Come, Darcy,” said he, “I must have you dance. I hate to see you standing about by yourself in this stupid manner. You had much better dance.”

“I certainly shall not. You know how I detest it, unless I am particularly acquainted with my partner. At such



D Why doesn't Mr Darcy want to dance?

E Who is Mr Bingley dancing with? What does Mr Darcy think of that girl?

an assembly as this, it would be insupportable. Your sisters are engaged, and there is not another woman in the room whom it would not be a punishment to me to stand up with.”
40 “I would not be so fastidious as you are,” cried Bingley, “for a kingdom! Upon my honour I never met with so many pleasant girls in my life, as I have this evening; and there are several of them, you see, uncommonly pretty.”
45 “You are dancing with the only handsome girl in the room,” said Mr Darcy, looking at the eldest Miss Bennet. “Oh! she is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld! But there is one of her sisters sitting down just behind you, who is very pretty, and I dare say very agreeable. Do let me ask my partner
50 to introduce you.”
“Which do you mean?” and turning round, he looked for a moment at Elizabeth, till catching her eye, he withdrew his own and coldly said, “She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*.”

(Chapter III)



Glossary

- countenance** face or expression
unaffected natural in the way you behave
mien a person's typical expression or appearance
forbidding having a frightening or unfriendly appearance
unworthy not deserving respect, attention
sharpened intensified
slighted ignored
press to persuade
am particularly acquainted with to know very well
fastidious hypercritical
behold to see or to look at something
tolerable unpleasant and only just able to be accepted

► DIGGING INTO THE TEXT

2 **2.138** Read and listen to the text. Answer the questions next to each paragraph.

3 Decide if the following statements are true (T) or false (F). Correct the false statements.

- 1 Mr Bingley said he would soon give a ball at Netherfield.
- 2 Mr Darcy only danced twice.
- 3 Mrs Bennet was furious with Mr Darcy.
- 4 Elizabeth could not hear what Mr Darcy was saying to Mr Bingley.
- 5 Mr Darcy usually likes dancing but not tonight.
- 6 Jane is younger than Elizabeth Bennet.

4 **PERSONAL RESPONSE** How do you think Elizabeth reacted to Darcy's words? If you were Elizabeth how would you react?

5 Read each of the following statements and decide whether you agree or disagree.

- 1 Pride is a quality.
- 2 Prejudices based on social differences still happen today.
- 3 First impressions are often wrong.
- 4 Love at first sight is a common occurrence.

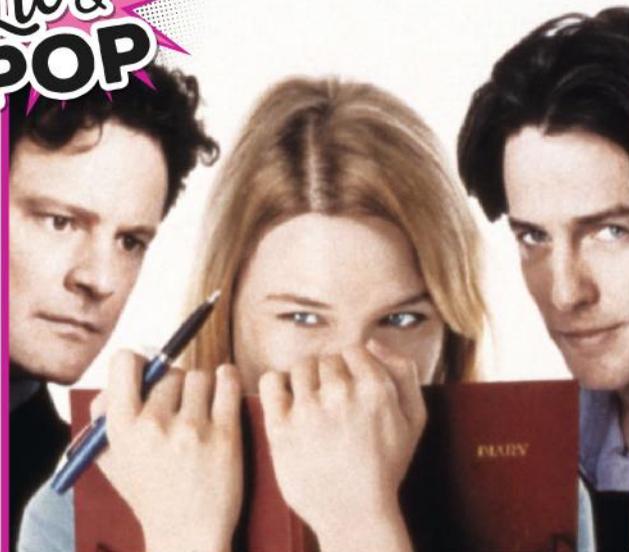
► WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

6 Match the main themes (a-c) of the novel with their descriptions (1-3).

a pride • b marriage • c prejudice

- 1 It refers to the tendency of the characters to judge one another based on preconceptions.
- 2 It blinds Elizabeth and Darcy to their true feelings about each other. Darcy does not respect people who do not belong to his circle. Elizabeth refuses to revise her opinion even when faced with clearly contradictory evidence.
- 3 Austen offers a close look at the status of women in the early 19th century when women were expected to marry in order to have financial security and this was rarely a romantic union.





Many modern writers have published **continuation stories** about Darcy and Elizabeth as well as some of the minor characters. For example, in 2011 P.D. James published *Death Comes to Pemberley*, a thriller. In 2013, Jo Baker wrote *Longbourn*, a version of the story from the perspective of the servants.

There are other **modern adaptations**, such as *Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding (1996). A sequel *Bridget Jones: the Edge of Reason* was published in 1999 and a new one, *Mad About the Boy* came out in 2013.

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries is a modernised adaptation which began airing in 2012 in the form of a video blog and *Matches and Matrimony* is a video game.

7 Match the following descriptions (1-3) with some of the titles given above.

- 1 It reimagines Austen's classic around a fictional vlog filmed in the bedroom of a 24-year-old grad student, living at home with a mountain of student debt.
- 2 A novel written in the form of a personal diary: it tells a year in the life of a single working woman who lives in London. She writes (often humorously) about her job, self-image, family, friends, and romantic relationships.
- 3 It mainly takes its plot from *Pride and Prejudice* with characters and incidents from *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion*. The player takes the role of Elizabeth Bennet and enters the world of Regency England. The player's character may end up marrying one of the Austen's six male characters or stay unmarried.

▶ THE CHARACTERS' GALLERY

8 Read the descriptions of the most important characters of the novel. Complete the gaps (1-4) with the missing sentences (a-d).

- a she seems almost too good to be true:
- b Elizabeth teaches him
- c Despite his huge wealth, he is humble and modest.
- d Instead she gives lots of importance to a person's independence of character and personal qualities.

▶ **Elizabeth Bennet** – The novel's heroine. She is smart, lively, and attractive. She enjoys studying people's characters. Elizabeth places little value on money and social position.
 1 She initially dislikes Darcy because of her own mistaken preconceptions about him. But she eventually falls in love with him.

▶ **Mr Darcy** – Bingley's closest friend. Darcy is very wealthy. His extreme class-consciousness makes him appear vain and proud. He has difficulty expressing his feelings.
 2 to see people more for who they are, rather than the status into which they were born.

▶ **Jane Bennet** – The oldest of the Bennet sisters, 3 beautiful, sweet-tempered, and modest. She always refuses to think badly of anyone. She falls in love with Bingley.

▶ **Mr Bingley** – Darcy's best friend. Unlike Darcy, however, Bingley is down to earth.
 4 He is easily influenced by others, especially by his close friend Darcy.



▶ THE BOOK AND ITS TIME

9 Complete the text with the best option.

Pride and Prejudice reflects English society at the ¹beginning / end of the 19th century in the so-called Regency Period. It was a time of ²small / great changes with the Industrial Revolution, the American War of Independence, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. Of all this there is hardly a hint in Austen's novels. Jane Austen was a close observer of her society, and one of the features that distinguished English society at the time she was writing was the structure of social classes. In *Pride and Prejudice* Austen describes the kind of people she ³knew well / had only heard of: the English landed gentry, or ⁴lower / upper class families with ⁵a small income / country estates. Irony helps her to capture the importance of status in English society and the snobbery of the wealthy upper class.

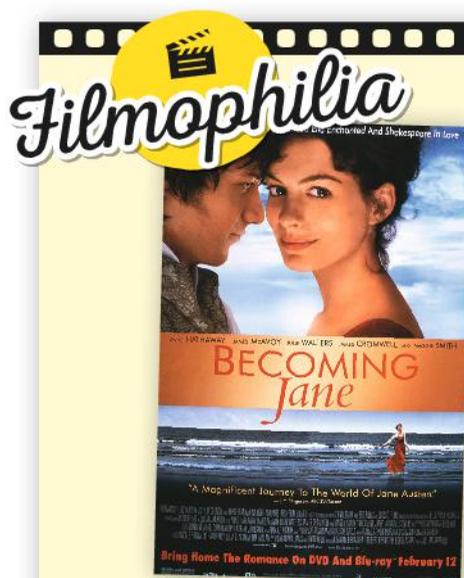
▶ THE LANGUAGE OF BOOKS

"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." The opening sentence of the novel is considered an example of Jane Austen's irony. The form of the sentence hides its real meaning which can be understood if we invert its terms, i.e. "a single girl of little or no fortune will almost certainly be in want of a wealthy husband". Irony in Jane Austen reflects the contrast between appearance and reality.

Let's meet the author

Jane Austen (1775-1801)

Jane Austen was born in Steventon near Basingstoke, the seventh child of the rector of the parish. She started writing novels at 14, although her first novel to be published, *Sense and Sensibility*, did not appear until 1811. Four novels were published in her lifetime. These are *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* (1816). *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* were published posthumously in 1818. At the beginning of the 19th century, writing novels was not a profession open to respectable women. For that reason, *Pride and Prejudice* was first published anonymously; its author was described only as "a lady." The inscription on Jane Austen's tomb described her as a daughter and a Christian, but not as a writer.



- ▶ *Pride and Prejudice* was first adapted for movies in a 1940 production.
- ▶ It was filmed again in 1995, as a mini-series for the BBC, featuring Colin Firth as Mr Darcy.
- ▶ *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) is a very entertaining Bollywood style adaptation.
- ▶ The most recent production stars Keira Knightley as Elizabeth and was filmed in 2005.
- ▶ *Becoming Jane* (2007) is a movie based on the life of Jane Austen. In it Anne Hathaway plays Austen, and James McAvoy is the romantic hero, Tom Lefroy. The movie cannot be considered a biography, but certain aspects of the story of Austen and Lefroy are true.

10 Surf the Net and look for the trailer of the film *Becoming Jane*. Fill in the following.

While everyone else was trying to fit in ¹
 She was a young woman ² until she met the one man ³