

“Emma keeps making mistakes, but I like her anyway. She means to be nice to Harriet.”
Freya, 10



EMMA

JANE AUSTEN

‘I must warn you that you might guess twenty things without guessing correctly.’

Following her governess’s marriage, wealthy, spoiled Emma Woodhouse seeks new company and new amusement. Ignoring the warnings of her friend Mr Knightley, she begins a series of terrible blunders.

Through letters to her sister, the author presents the reader with puzzles to confuse even the best detective. Who sent the mystery piano? Why is Mr Elton so charming and Miss Fairfax so reserved? How many men can Harriet love? Who is hiding a shocking secret?

With little understanding of her own feelings, can Emma lead anyone towards happiness?

Can you solve any of the mysteries before Emma does?



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Jane Austen



Retold by Gill Tavner
Illustrated by Ann Kronheimer



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THE CHARACTERS

Emma Woodhouse

Emma is beautiful, clever and rich. Does she truly understand other people's hearts? Does she even understand her own?

Mr Woodhouse

Emma's frail father is afraid of wedding cake and afraid of change. Does he really have anything to fear?

Harriet Smith

Harriet is seventeen, pretty, and easily led. Will her friendship with Emma bring her happiness? How many men can a girl love in one year?

Mr Elton

The gallant Mr Elton seems keen to marry. Can Emma find him the right wife?

Mr Knightley

Emma's friend and neighbour is a perfect gentleman. Can he undo the damage caused by her father's indulgence? Can he escape her matchmaking schemes?

Jane Fairfax

Jane Fairfax is beautiful, talented and honest. Or is she? Why doesn't Emma like her? Is her reserved nature hiding a secret?

Frank Churchill

Frank is a lively young gentleman whom Emma quickly likes. Why doesn't Mr Knightley like him? Does he really travel to London just for a haircut?

My dear sister Cassandra,

Thank you for your entertaining letter. I cannot reply at length as I am busy with my next novel, 'Emma'. Instead of letters, I will send you chapters as I write them. I hope you enjoy it. The plot will present you with a series of puzzles, but I must warn you that you might guess twenty things without guessing correctly.

I wonder what you will think of Emma herself? I think perhaps I have created a heroine whom no one but myself will much like. Let me know what you think.

Affectionately,

Jane



EMMA

‘Please don’t eat too much wedding cake, my dear,’ cautioned the frail Mr Woodhouse. ‘It is very bad for the stomach. Indeed, weddings in general are very bad for the health. They always mean change, and change is always so troublesome.’

‘Dearest father,’ soothed Emma, ‘you must surely agree that Mr and Mrs Weston’s marriage promises them both great happiness.’

‘But Emma, how will you bear the loss of your governess’s company now that she has married?’

Mr Knightley, a trusted and respected family friend and neighbour, rescued Emma from this line of conversation. ‘I am sure Emma has sufficient liveliness of spirit to occupy her days,’ he assured Mr Woodhouse, accepting a second piece of cake from Emma.

‘Thank you, Mr Knightley,’ smiled Emma. ‘Besides, I congratulate myself upon making this match. I always thought Mr Weston would be

a most suitable husband for Miss Taylor. Having experienced such success, I shall now fill my hours making similar matches for our other friends.'

'Please leave me out of such foolish schemes,' frowned Mr Knightley.

'Avoid all such schemes, my dear,' said an alarmed Mr Woodhouse. 'We do not want any more marriages.'

'Don't worry, father, I shall not make matches for myself or for Mr Knightley, so you need not fear too much change.' Mr Knightley was such a regular and valued visitor at Hartfield that any change in his situation would indeed be a blow to Mr Woodhouse.

Mr Knightley smiled. 'I am pleased that you will kindly leave me to find my own happiness, Emma.' With a sterner, more concerned look, he drew Emma away from her father's hearing. Mr Knightley, who had known Emma all her life, was one of the few people who could see faults in her, and the only one who ever told her of them. 'Emma, Mr and Mrs Weston found each other without your help.



- Frank and Jane are forgiven by everybody for keeping their engagement a secret. Everybody wishes them well.

Back in time

Jane Austen began writing *Emma* in 1814. It was published in 1816, just one year before her death at the age of forty-one.

A keen letter writer, Jane Austen maintained a regular correspondence with her older sister, Cassandra. This *Real Reads Emma* draws upon the idea of the letters, rather than upon the contents of the letters themselves.

At the same time as writing *Emma*, Jane Austen was advising her niece Anna upon the techniques of writing a novel. She wrote, ‘three or four families in a country village is the very thing to work on’. She follows her own advice in *Emma*. Through writing about something that seems so simple, Jane Austen creates a complex novel, revealing the interaction and interdependence of Highbury’s small community.

Due to her father’s personality, Emma has never been far from Highbury. Even for a woman of her financial security and independence, Emma’s activities are still influenced by the men around her.

In all of her novels, Jane Austen shows the restrictions within which women lived. As a woman, Miss Bates did not inherit her family’s wealth. To avoid her aunt’s fate, Jane Fairfax must either become a governess or marry wisely. Emma seeks to improve Harriet’s future by arranging an advantageous marriage. However, Jane Austen would never have advised anybody to marry without love.

Finding out more

We recommend the following books and websites to gain a greater understanding of Jane Austen’s England:

Books

- Gill Hornby, *Who was Jane Austen? The Girl with the Magic Pen*, Short Books, 2005.