Baker Street Readers

Great reads for all ages

'You are the last man in the world I would marry.'

Why does spirited, lively Elizabeth Bennet so rudely reject the proposal of the handsome, rich Mr Darcy? What could he possibly have done to offend her?

Elizabeth is proud of her ability to judge others; Mr Darcy is proud of his family name. When their social worlds collide, feelings run high.

Misunderstandings, poor judgement and wicked lies bring danger to the Bennet family. Can broken hearts be mended? Can hurtful words be forgiven? Can the Bennets be drawn back from the brink of disgrace?

Will Elizabeth's prejudice and Darcy's pride be the ruin of them both?

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"Miniature masterpieces"
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PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

JANE AUSTEN

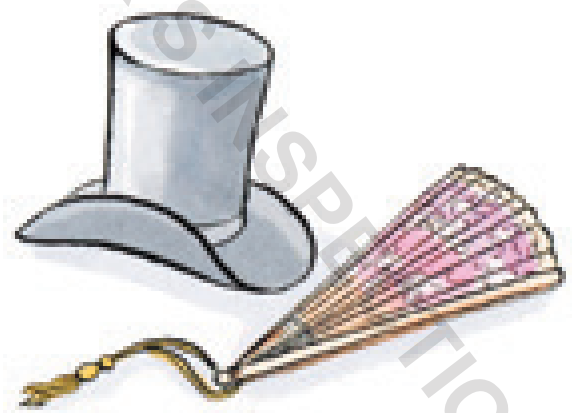
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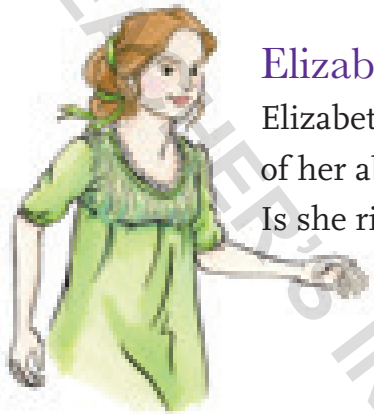
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THE CHARACTERS



Elizabeth Bennet

Elizabeth is lively, clever and proud of her ability to judge other people. Is she right to dislike Mr Darcy, or has she made a terrible mistake?



Jane Bennet

Jane, Elizabeth's elder sister, is beautiful, gentle, and in love. Will Mr Bingley ever offer her the happiness she deserves?



Mr Darcy

Wealthy and good-looking, Mr Darcy is surely a perfect husband for any young lady. Will he win Elizabeth's love, or will his pride always offend her?

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Mr Bingley

Mr Bingley is handsome, rich and easy-going. Will he take Mr Darcy's advice, or follow his own heart in his search for happiness?



Lydia Bennet

Lydia is Jane and Elizabeth's younger sister. Will her foolish actions ruin the reputation and happiness of her entire family?



Mr Wickham

The gallant, charming Mr Wickham tells a sad story. Should Elizabeth believe him? Can *anybody* trust him?



Mr and Mrs Bennet

Mrs Bennet is desperate for her daughters to marry well, but her judgement is somewhat lacking. Will her long-suffering husband offer his family any guidance?



PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

THE PROPOSAL

Mr Darcy paced awkwardly around the room. Elizabeth, sitting and watching him, observed his fine, tall figure, and was surprised to sense uncertainty in his arrogant features. He sat down, cleared his throat as though to speak, said nothing, and stood up again. Why had this man, the last person in the world she wanted to see, come to disturb her peaceful evening?

Mr Darcy sat down again. 'It is no good,' he began, 'I have fought hard against my feelings, but it has been in vain. I must tell you how ardently I admire and love you. I should like you to be my wife.'

Elizabeth stared at him in astonishment, blushed, and remained silent.

Taking her silence as encouragement, Mr Darcy continued. 'Your mother is vulgar

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and embarrassing, your younger sister's behaviour is objectionable, and your father stubbornly fails to correct her. You and your elder sister somehow rise above your family with honour and good sense.' He smiled at Elizabeth. 'In spite of them all, you have earned my respect, admiration and love.' He awaited her grateful response.

Elizabeth struggled to control her voice. 'Mr Darcy, I cannot thank you for your proposal when you so freely offend me. You like me against your judgement and against your will. You will therefore be more relieved than disappointed by my refusal. Had you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner, I might at least have felt some compassion for you, but I do not.'

Mr Darcy stared in astonishment, but said nothing.

Elizabeth continued with feeling. 'I learned this afternoon that you were responsible for

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separating my dear sister Jane from your friend Mr Bingley, thus spoiling the happiness of two good people.'

Mr Darcy turned pale. 'Such a marriage would have brought shame to my friend. I have been kinder to him than I have been to myself.'

Now trembling, Elizabeth continued. 'Even if I had been able to overcome this scruple in my response to your proposal, I cannot forget your dishonourable treatment of poor Mr Wickham, whose life you have ruined.'

'Is this your opinion of me?' asked Mr Darcy, the quietness of his voice barely hiding his disappointment and anger.

'Yes. You are the last man in the world I would marry.'

Without another word Mr Darcy left the room. Watching from the window as his upright figure retreated along the garden path, Elizabeth was left in a terrible flutter. In spite of her dislike for him, it was flattering that the

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Back in time

Pride and Prejudice is probably Jane Austen's most well-known and most popular novel, thanks to its sparkling wit, enduring subject matter and romantic plot.

In Jane Austen's time, the relationship between marriage and money was very important. Women were neither expected nor educated to work for a living. Furthermore, estates were usually inherited by the eldest son. If there was no son, they would be left to the nearest male relative. This is why Mr Bennet's estate will pass to Mr Collins. Marrying a wealthy man was, for many women, the most respectable way to gain independence and achieve comfort.

The moral code governing relations between men and women was very strict. Lydia's flirting with the soldiers is inappropriate. By eloping with Wickham she could ruin her own reputation and respectability as well as that of her family. It is only through Mr Darcy's actions in making Wickham marry Lydia that the Bennet family's social standing is saved.

Jane Austen was writing at a time of major

change. Although she would have been aware of the violent social conflicts of her time, she chose to concentrate on the minute details of everyday life. She once described her writing as 'this little bit of ivory upon which I work with so fine a brush to produce litle effect after much labour'. Her 'little bit of ivory' is human interaction, as fascinating today as it was to her. Thanks to Jane's talent, Mr Darcy still makes female hearts beat a little faster.

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.
- Jon Spence, *Becoming Jane Austen*, Hambledon Continuum, 2007.
- Josephine Ross, *Jane Austen's Guide to Good Manners: Compliments, Charades and Horrible Blunders*, Bloomsbury, 2006.

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