Baker Street Readers

Great reads for all ages

Marianne is ablaze with fire and passion; Elinor keeps her own heat under control.

Marianne seeks a man who shares her eager spirit; Elinor is in love with the polite, considerate Edward Ferrars.

Their younger sister Margaret watches in bewilderment as Marianne and Elinor experience the joys and heartaches of early adult life. Is Marianne too warm or is Elinor too cold? Whose example should Margaret follow?

Margaret records the dangers presented by scheming friends and deceitful lovers. Will Elinor's sense be strong enough to support both sisters, or will Marianne's sensibility bring tragedy?

What will you learn as you read Margaret's account?

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Word count: 5,310

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"Miniature masterpieces"
- BBC R4, Open Book

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY JANE AUSTEN

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TEACHER'S SIMPLIFICATION ONLY

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THE CHARACTERS



Elinor Dashwood

Elinor believes that emotions should be controlled. Will she be strong enough to hide her own heartache and offer the help her sister needs?



Marianne Dashwood

Marianne has a passion for life. Will her enthusiasm lead her into trouble? Upon whom should she rely?



Edward Ferrars

Gentle Edward longs to be a clergyman. Trapped by a promise made long ago, will he ever find happiness?



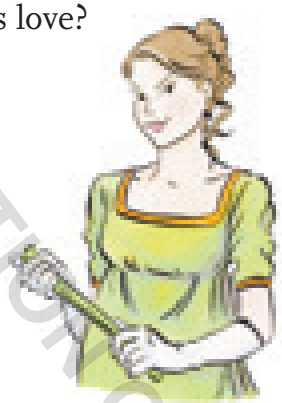
John Willoughby

Willoughby is handsome and passionate, and seems an ideal match for Marianne. But can she trust him?



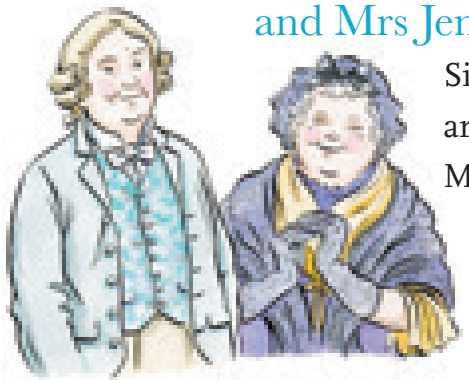
Colonel Brandon

Colonel Brandon is middle-aged, wealthy, shy and generous. Can such a man ever gain Marianne's love?



Lucy Steele

Why does Lucy seek Elinor's friendship? Should Elinor trust her as a friend, or fear her as a rival?



Sir John Middleton and Mrs Jennings

Sir John and his mother-in-law are anxious to help Elinor and Marianne find happiness. Will their match-making succeed, or cause heartache?

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SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

Our cottage has been very quiet since my two older sisters left. Mama and I often sit together, discussing the events of the last two years. Oh, don't feel sorry for us. We spend half of our time visiting Elinor and Marianne, and even when we are here we are not short of invitations. Our neighbours, Sir John Middleton and his mother-in-law Mrs Jennings, used to show very little interest in me, but now that my sisters are married they seem to have decided that, at the age of fifteen, I am old enough to be their next match-making project. You know how adults can be.

I must admit that I enter this bewildering adult world with some trepidation. After two years watching the confusion, intrigues and intense emotions of my sisters' paths to true love, I cannot help but feel apprehensive about what the next few years might hold in store for me.

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Two months ago, when all the heartbreak ended and my second happily married sister left home, I wasn't sure how to fill my time. Now, however, I have decided upon a project. I am going to write it all down, just as I saw it unfold.



When father died, a complication in his will meant that he left all his money to our brother, depending on him to be generous to the rest of us. He wasn't. He moved his family into our beautiful old home at Norland, leaving us to find a modest cottage on a relative's estate in Devon. The day we left Norland, Marianne and I were in agonies of grief as we walked around the grounds.

'Oh, dear Norland; oh, happy house,' wept Marianne. 'Oh, dear trees.' We pressed our cheeks against their trunks, the rain running down them mingling with our tears.

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Elinor found us.

'Marianne, Margaret, we must control our emotions for Mama's sake.'

'Oh, unfeeling Elinor,' sighed Marianne, 'you have not our strength of feeling, or you would not be so calm. And you have more reason than we do to be sad, as you will be so many miles from Edward.'

A shadow momentarily clouded Elinor's face. 'Marianne, you know that I greatly esteem Edward Ferrars, indeed I like him, but we really must exert ourselves.'

'Esteem? Like? Oh, cold-hearted Elinor!' retorted Marianne as we all walked back towards the house. After some thought she added, 'I suppose Edward lacks the qualities to inspire stronger feelings. He is kind and honourable, but his eyes lack fire; he lacks passion; he is tame and spiritless.'

'You are unfair to him,' replied Elinor.

When we reached the house, we discovered

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Back in time

Sense and Sensibility is one of Jane Austen's first novels, written when she was in her early twenties.

In Jane Austen's time, the relationship between marriage and money was very important. Women of her class were neither expected nor educated to work for a living. They therefore depended upon their family. Marrying a wealthy man was the most respectable way to gain independence and achieve comfort.

The moral code governing relationships between men and women was very strict. This is why Marianne's open behaviour with Willoughby is inappropriate without an engagement. Even writing him a letter is unacceptable. To have been physically forward with him would have been seen as leading Marianne towards the same ruin as that faced by Eliza.

Jane Austen was writing at a time of major change. Revolutions in France and America demonstrated the potential destructiveness of new ways of thinking. Although Jane Austen does not include politics in her novels, we can see the influence of the ideas which surrounded her.

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The period before Jane Austen's adulthood has become known as 'the age of reason'. Self-control was highly valued. In fashionable formal gardens even nature was tightly controlled. However, a new age, that of 'feeling' or 'sensibility', was just beginning. This new way of thinking valued freedom, passion and wild landscapes. We can see that Elinor represents the importance of reason and control, whilst Marianne represents emotion. Although Elinor, like Marianne, experiences strong feelings, she has learned to control them.

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.

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