

THE JANE AUSTEN BOOK CLUB

THE JANE AUSTEN BOOK CLUB

KSTAUDTE

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Dedication

V & W. See you at Brighton.

Contents

Introduction	I
I. Our Book Club Origins and Philosophy	3
2. Organization	5
<i>Choosing your book</i>	6
<i>Routines and rituals</i>	7
<i>Keeping records</i>	10

3.	Literary Activities	12
	<i>Themes and Stories</i>	12
	<i>Sacred Practices</i>	13
		18
	<i>Concept Mapping</i>	21
	<i>Perspective Exercises</i>	24
	<i>Creative Redesign</i>	26
	<i>Found Poetry</i>	27
	<i>Historical Research</i>	28
	<i>Word Blank Activity</i>	28
4.	Our Florilegium	30
	<i>Sense and Sensibility</i>	31
	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	33
	<i>Emma</i>	34
	<i>Persuasion</i>	35
	List of Themes	37
	Pride and Prejudice Word Blank Activity	40
	<i>PRIDE AND PREJUDICE, BY JANE AUSTEN</i>	41
	& [your name here]	

Introduction

Three women. Peppermint tea. And Jane.

Our Jane Austen book club has brought us together in new and glorious ways. As we discuss her stories, our own stories emerge and coalesce. Week by week, we build our community, story upon story. This short book will outline the story of our book club, the rituals and routines we follow, and our favorite moments from our meetings. It will also suggest other approaches to organizing and conducting a book club.

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I

OUR BOOK CLUB ORIGINS AND PHILOSOPHY

In early 2019, we began to listen to the podcast Harry Potter and the Sacred Text. We loved the premise of this podcast: that if you treat a text as sacred, inspiration can come. The hosts of this podcast outlined three steps to treating a text as sacred: trust that the text can bring us blessings; read the text with rigor and focus; and read the text within a community. We decided that we wanted to embark on this journey and that we wanted to use Jane Austen's novels as our sacred text.

Our Jane Austen Book Club is founded on three principles:

Respect the text. Read with the expectation of finding meaning.

Listen with charity. Give grace to your fellow club members, the characters within the novels, and yourself.

Act with integrity. When the text calls you to see yourself clearly or change something in your life, acknowledge and act on that calling.



ORGANIZATION

Choosing your book

Our book club was organized specifically because I wanted to reread Jane Austen and I wanted to have a group of people who would read and discuss it with me. However, book clubs can also be organized purely for the sake of structured gathering, with the actual reading material being more of an afterthought. In this



case, the reading list can be structured in a variety of ways.

- You could select a series of books that you want to read through.
- You could cultivate a list of books together.
- You could take turns selecting the book.
- You could select a published book list to read through. Book list resources include thegreatestbooks.org, favobooks.com, Goodreads. Many leaders, celebrities, and

THE JANE AUSTEN BOOK CLUB

activists also have published their own reading lists.

You could branch out and incorporate other forms of media (movies, podcasts, academic journal articles, YouTube videos). The other forms of media could stand alone or could be related to a book you read. For example, in our book club, after reading a book, we watch all the film adaptations of the book and take time to analyze the effectiveness of each adaptation.

Routines and rituals

One way to build a community is by instituting traditions. When everyone in the community knows what to expect, they are less likely to experience feelings of uncertainty or loneliness. They feel a sense of belonging and are more confident in their ability to prepare for and actively participate in the community. In our book club meetings, we have several routines which help us to all feel included and make it simple to plan each meeting. Many of these routines were inspired by Harry Potter and the Sacred Text.

- We take turns hosting book club, and the host is responsible for providing herbal tea and a small treat.
- At the beginning of each meeting, the host tells

a story related to the week's theme (see chapter 3 for more information). A second member then provides a small piece of biographical information about Jane Austen, and the third member provides a brief summary of the week's reading.

- Then we discuss our thoughts about the reading.
- We each share a favorite quote from the week's reading and why we chose that quote. This process is part of a sacred practice called *Flora Legia* (see chapter 3 for more information).
- We complete a literary analysis practice using an excerpt from the reading.
- We take turns "blessing" a character (see chapter 3 for more information).
- We end by planning for next week's meeting.

Of course, this list is not all-inclusive. There are many other rituals that could enhance your book club routine:

- Visit different local cafes or parks for each meeting.
- As members arrive, the host can play music that reminds them of the week's reading.
- The host could serve food that relates to the

THE JANE AUSTEN BOOK CLUB

book, or all members could bring a dish.

- Create trivia questions or brief quizzes about the reading, the author, the era in which the book was written, or other relevant topics.
- Take personality quizzes related to the book (e.g. “Which Jane Austen Character Are You?”).
- Create surveys or do a live poll to elicit members’ opinions about what happened in the reading.
- Each member chooses a character with whom they identify the most in that week’s reading and explains why.
- Invite an expert on the book subject to visit your book club, or watch a video with background information about the author, era of the book, historical events mentioned in the story, the genre, or other related topics.
- End by making predictions about what will happen in next week’s reading.

Keeping records



Our book club keeps a record of each meeting, including the date we met, who hosted, the chapters we read, who summarized the reading, and who provided the biographical information that week. We also keep a list of all the Flora Legia from each book. This list will be provided at the end of this book.

We use a Google Doc to store all of our book club records. Because of the collaborative functions in Google Drive, each member has editing access to the club document and can make changes as needed.

Depending on the structure and needs of your book

THE JANE AUSTEN BOOK CLUB

club, you may need to use other record-keeping systems or apps. Below are some additional online resources that could be helpful for your book club:

Book club sites and apps:

- <http://bookmovement.com/bookclubapp/>
- <https://bookclubz.com/>
- <https://www.ourownbookclub.com/index.php>

Calendar and scheduling websites:

- <https://doodle.com/free-online-appointment-scheduling>
- <https://calendly.com/>
- <https://calendar.google.com/>

LITERARY ACTIVITIES

Themes and Stories

Each week, the host for the upcoming meeting selects a different theme to search for within the reading. These themes can be a topic we anticipate being prevalent in the reading, one we are interested in, one that we struggle with, or one we would like to learn more about. Below is a list of some of the themes we have studied thus far:

Intimacy	Acceptance	Loyalty	Escape
Control	Awareness	Partnership	Discovery
Friendship	Belonging	Yearning	Unity

THE JANE AUSTEN BOOK CLUB

See the appendix for a longer list of possible themes.

Throughout the week, we each search for instances in which the theme appeared in the reading and take note of any questions we have about the theme and the reading. At the beginning of each meeting, the host introduces the theme by sharing a story from their life or from history that relates to the theme. They could share pictures or artifacts that relate to their story as they are telling it. At the end of their story, they may share some kind of conclusion, lesson learned, or question which they hope will be addressed through the course of the meeting.

Sacred Practices

Historically, the following literary practices were used in the context of analyzing sacred texts. By using them as literary tools to study Jane Austen, we are not conflating fiction with religion; rather, we are simply treating stories with respect and demonstrating our hope that we can learn something from them. We originally learned about these practices from the podcast *Harry Potter and the Sacred Text*.

1. Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is a slow-paced and deliberate approach to studying scripture. The purpose of this practice is not to gain information explicitly in the text; rather, it is to see

beyond the text and make connections between the text and your life.

- Select a short excerpt of text (1-5 sentences). You can choose the excerpt deliberately, but we prefer to select one at random during our meeting. Read the excerpt aloud.
- **Narrative:** Contextualize the passage by describing what is happening in this part of the story.
- **Allegory:** Discuss connections between this excerpt and other parts of the story, or other stories. Consider the events, characters, or symbols, and how they might relate to other stories.
- **Contemplation:** Share connections between this excerpt and experiences from your life.
- **Reflection:** Share a call to action that you feel is offered to you by the text. These invitations could include something you feel you should do, learn, or change.

2. PaRDeS



PaRDeS is a Hebrew practice traditionally used to study the Torah. The word 'PaRDeS' is an acronym for the four levels of interpretation within this practice: P'shat, Remez, D'rash & Sud. This acronym is also a Hebrew word meaning 'orchard'; the implication is that the body of text is comparable to an orchard, and a reader can select at

random any part of the text and they will find fruit from that selection. After randomly selecting a short excerpt of text, complete the following steps or PaRDeS.

- P'shat: Describe the literal meaning of the text. You can address the historical context, cultural setting, and the literary style of the excerpt (including figurative, symbolic, or allegorical language).
- Remez: Discuss the hidden or implied meaning of the excerpt.
- D'rash: Discuss the possible applications of the P'shat or Remez. You could share what "sermon" you would teach based on this text.
- Sud: Look for the secret or mystical meaning of the text.

3. Florilegium

The name for this sacred practice comes from Latin—'flor' meaning 'flower,' and 'legere' meaning 'to gather.' The goal of florilegium is to learn by gathering bits of text that stand out to you and putting those different pieces of text in conversation with each other. In a group context, each member could select one quote from the text. Then use the following prompts to analyze the excerpts.

- **Share quotes** with the group and explain the

THE JANE AUSTEN BOOK CLUB

context. It could be helpful to write them down next to each other.

- **Compare** and contrast the quotes. Look for shared words, metaphors, symbols, or literary structure.
- **Discuss** how the quotes connect to other parts of the text, other texts, your own life, or society in general.
- **Find new meaning** in the collection of quotes. Look for common themes or emotions, as well as contradictions or juxtapositions.
- **Identify any invitation**, call to action, or question you feel like the collection is signaling to you.

4. Sacred Imagination



This sacred practice is attributed to Saint Ignatius Loyola, who invited his associates to participate in a creative contemplation of the scriptures focusing on the five senses.

- Begin by selecting a passage. You can choose a passage at random, but you may want to select a

THE JANE AUSTEN BOOK CLUB

passage ahead of time that is eventful, interesting, or meaningful to you.

- Read the passage. You could all read the passage individually, or one member could read it aloud while the other members close their eyes and listen.
- Close your eyes and use your imagination to experience the scene firsthand. What point of view are you taking? Are you experiencing this from a specific character's point of view, or are you a bystander? Who do you see? Notice their appearances, emotions, decisions, and actions. Pay attention to your five senses. Do you see, smell, hear, taste, or feel anything?
- Describe your insights or thoughts that resulted from this practice.

5. Havruta

Havruta (literally 'companionship') is a traditional approach to studying the Talmud. Within this process, a small group of students sit together to analyze and debate a shared text for the purpose of coming to a deeper understanding through dialogue. There is no teacher in havruta; rather, all participants are peers.

- One reader comes up with a question about a passage of text and poses the question to the

group. Questions can be about the motives of the characters, meaning behind words or actions; look for a “gap in the text,” things that aren’t obviously explained in the text.

- The first reader then provides a possible answer to their question.
- Other readers respond to the provided answer, asking follow-up questions and digging deeper. Challenge the first reader on their question or answer with the intention of helping (not to argue). Questions like “Is this idea supported by the text?” “What are the limitations of this idea?” “How would this idea stand up under this particular hypothetical situation?” Avoid simply affirming everything other readers say.
- Other readers then provide their own answers to the same question.
- Discuss how to apply the meaning of the passage in your life.

6. Blessings

A blessing can take many forms. Generally speaking, a blessing is a hope or a wish for a character within the text. It can also be a grateful acknowledgement of an admirable action, decision, or trait. You do not need to limit your blessings to “good” characters.

THE JANE AUSTEN BOOK CLUB

Name the character you wish to bless.

Explain the trait, action, or decision that has influenced your choice to bless them.

If you desire, you can extend that blessing to others who are in a similar situation.

Here is an example from the book *Persuasion*: “I would like to bless Mary. I see how desperate she is to be included and loved throughout this week’s reading, and sometimes this feeling leads her to make choices that have unintended effects and lead others to feel hurt, uncomfortable, and frustrated. I can see how her experiences growing up as the youngest, and often forgotten, child have led her to become who she is, and I want to bless her that she learns to accept herself and her situation and to treat herself (and others) with love. I want to extend this blessing to others who may feel forgotten. May they realize how their actions affect others, and most importantly, may they feel loved and remembered.”

Below are other literary analysis practices you may enjoy:

Concept Mapping

Concept mapping is a great way to organize ideas, characters, or events in a visual format. A concept map consists of nodes and connections. A node can be any idea that you want to relate to other ideas; nodes are usually a shape with words written inside. The connections

between the nodes explain how the nodes are related; these connections are usually represented by lines. Below are different ways your book club could use concept maps:

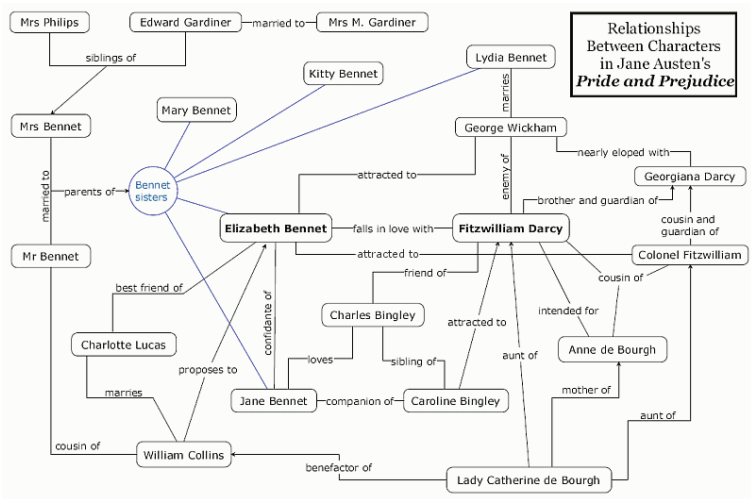
- You could spend one meeting collaborating on a group concept map.
- You could each create a concept map before the meeting and share your ideas during the meeting.
- You could add to a running concept map each week as new ideas and relations come to your attention.

Here are some suggested prompts that you can use concept maps to explore:

- What kind of events occur at different locations within the book? Use a concept map to track where characters go and what they do at these locations. Do any patterns emerge through your analysis?
- How do characters throughout each book you read remind you of characters from other books? Create a large concept map, with a node for each book. The main characters from each book will be sub-nodes. Draw lines between sub-nodes representing similarities you see between characters from different books. Beside

the lines, provide a brief explanation for the connection. For example, you could connect Mrs. Gardner from *Pride and Prejudice* with Mrs. Weston from *Emma*. Along the connecting line, you could write “Provide loving support and maternal acceptance to main heroines (Elizabeth and Emma, respectively).” You could also include citations to support your assertions.

- How do relationships between characters change throughout the book? The nodes can be the different states, and the lines can symbolize the events or processes that lead to the changes.
- How are characters related to each other within the book? This is an especially useful task at the beginning of a character-heavy novel.



Pride and Prejudice Character Map

Perspective Exercises

To complete this exercise, first you must select constraints: will you focus on one character or more than one? Will you focus on a specific event, or consider a character through multiple events. Once you select a character and time, contemplate the character's experience within that time and discuss any of the following questions:

- What does this character see, hear, smell, feel, and taste in this moment?
- How might this character be feeling about the people around them?
- How might this character's past experiences

THE JANE AUSTEN BOOK CLUB

affect their perception of present events?

- Why does the character behave in a certain way in this moment?
- Have I ever felt this way or had a similar experience?
- How can my experience inform my interpretation of this character's experience? And how can the character's experience and behavior inform my interpretation of my experience?

For example, you could contemplate the moment in *Sense and Sensibility* in which Marianne approaches Willoughby at the dance in London and cannot understand his cold demeanor. You could take Marianne's perspective, or you could think about Elinor, Willoughby, or another onlooker.

Creative Redesign



Creative

redesign invites readers to use what they are learning about the characters or world of the novel to craft alternate events. Choose a situation within the book and ask yourself, “What would it take for this event to turn out differently?” Using your knowledge of the characters, you could ask yourself, “How would this person have behaved had the situation been different?” or “What might character A do if they were in the same situation as character B?” Below are example prompts:

THE JANE AUSTEN BOOK CLUB

- Design a marriage proposal that Elizabeth (*Pride and Prejudice*) would be likely to accept.
- What would have happened if Harriet (*Emma*) had accepted Robert Martin's first proposal?
- How would Jane Bennet (*Pride and Prejudice*) have behaved if it had been she (and not Elizabeth) to whom Mr. Collins proposed?
- Knowing Mr. Willoughby's character, how would a marriage between him and Marianne pan out?

Found Poetry

To complete this activity, you will need to scan and print excerpts from your chosen book. You can select the excerpts at random or choose parts that stand out to you. With a pair of scissors, cut out words and phrases until you have a large selection. Make sure to include plenty of operational words (such as verbs, articles, and prepositions). Put the slips of paper in a bowl and have each member select some at random. Arrange the words in any way that is aesthetically pleasing to create your "found poem." Once you have arranged your poem, you can glue the words onto a new piece of paper and take turns reading your finished pieces.

Historical Research

You could incorporate history into your study, even when studying fiction. Research the time period in which the book takes place or when the author lived. Ask questions like, “How would historical events have impacted the characters in this book?” or “What aspects of the author’s culture influenced their work?” Create a collection of images of locations where the characters may have visited, books they may have read, or famous people they might have known about.



An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.uiowa.edu/kstaudte/?p=23>

Word Blank Activity

Individually, select a favorite excerpt and replace important words with blanks. Take note of the parts of speech that belong in each blank, and make an ordered list of those parts of speech on a separate piece of paper. Ask the others to come up a word for each part of speech on the list. Do not let them see the original excerpt. Finally, reread the excerpt aloud, filling in the blanks with the

THE JANE AUSTEN BOOK CLUB

random words provided by the other members. This activity produces amusing, and sometimes even meaningful, results. For an example from *Pride and Prejudice*, see the appendix.

OUR FLORILEGIUM

Sense and Sensibility



Sir John did not much understand this reproof; but he laughed as heartily as if he did.

She knew that what Marianne and her mother conjectured one moment, they believed the next – that with them, to wish was to hope, and to hope was to expect.

Cold-hearted Elinor! Oh! worse than cold-hearted! Ashamed of being otherwise.

Elinor attempted no more. But Marianne, in her place, would not have done so little. The whole story would have been speedily formed under her active imagination; and

every thing established in the most melancholy order of disastrous love.

She knows her own worth too well for false shame.

At my time of life opinions are tolerably fixed. It is not likely that I should now see or hear any thing to change them.

Elinor was pleased that he'd called and still more pleased that she had missed him.

Such advances towards heroism in her sister, made Elinor feel equal to any thing herself.

Elinor agreed to it all, for she did not think he deserved the compliment of rational opposition.

Pride and Prejudice



A nice sheltered path, which no one seemed to value but herself.

Importance may sometimes be purchased too dearly.

Mr Collins listened to her with the determined air of following his own inclination...

In vain I have struggled, it will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you.

I am glad you are come back Lizzy.

Till this moment I never knew myself.

She wished, she feared that the master of the house might be amongst them; and whether she wished or feared it most, she could scarcely determine.

A little sea-bathing would set me up forever.

It was gratitude, gratitude not merely for having once loved her, but for loving her still.

I was in the middle before I knew that I had begun.

Elizabeth was forced to put it out of her power by running away.

Think only of the past as its remembrance gives you pleasure.

Emma

Keep your raptures for Harriet's face.

Vanity working on a weak head produces every sort of mischief.

There are people who the more you do for them, the less they will do for themselves.

The appearance of the little sitting-room as they entered, was tranquility itself.

Jane's curiosity did not appear of that absorbing nature as wholly to occupy her.

But in coming home I felt I might do anything.

She always travels with her own sheets.

I am ready whenever I am wanted.

Mr. Knightley seemed to be trying not to smile; and succeeded without difficulty, upon Mrs. Elton's beginning to talk to him.

No—Mrs. Knightley. Until she is in being, I shall manage such matters myself.

He had ridden home through the rain.

But, in spite of these deficiencies, the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union.

Persuasion

...and envied them nothing but that seemingly perfect good understanding and agreement together, that good-humoured mutual affection, of which she had known so little herself with either of her sisters.

She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older—the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning.

Lady Russell loved them all; but it was only in Anne that she could fancy the mother to revive again.

Being too much in the secrets of the complaints of each house.

Anne longed for the power of representing to them all what they were about, and of pointing out some of the evils they were exposing themselves to.



While we were together, you know, there was nothing to be feared.

They were people whom her heart turned to very naturally.

All, all declared that he had a heart returning to her.

At last, Anne was at home again, and happier than any one in that house could have conceived.

List of Themes

Ability	Consideration	Endings	Home	Need
Acceptance	Contentment	Endurance	Honesty	Obligation
Action	Control	Energy	Honor	Obsession
Admiration	Cooperation	Enthusiasm	Hope	Omens
Adoration	Coping	Entitlement	Humility	Opinion
Adventure	Corruption	Envy	Humor	Opportunity
Affection	Courage	Escape	Hurdles	Optimism
Amazement	Cowardice	Excellence	Hurt	Pain
Ambitiousness	Creativity	Excitement	Ideals	Parenthood
Anger	Crime	Failure	Imagination	Partnership
Anxiety	Crisis	Fairness	Impatience	Patience
Apprehension	Cruelty	Faith	Improvement	Patriotism
Artistry	Culture	Faithfulness	Infatuation	Peace
Attraction	Curiosity	Familiarity	Inheritance	Peacefulness
Authority	Daring	Family	Innocence	Peculiarities
Awe	Death	Fandom	Inspiration	Perseverance
Beauty	Deceit	Fascination	Instinct	Persistence
Belief	Deception	Favoritism	Integrity	Persuasiveness
Belonging	Decisiveness	Fear	Intelligence	Pessimism
Betrayal	Dedication	Femininity	invention	Play
Blindness	Defeat	Foresight	Isolation	Pleasure
Boldness	Defiance	Forgiveness	Jealousy	Poverty
Boundaries	Delight	Fragility	Joy	Power
Bravery	Democracy	Freedom	Judgment	Preciousness
Brilliance	Despair	Friendship	Justice	Pride

THE JANE AUSTEN BOOK CLUB

Brutality	Desperation	Frustration	Kindness	Principle
Calmness	Destiny	Generosity	Knowledge	Progress
Caring	Determination	Glamor	Laughter	Promises
Caution	Devotion	Goal-setting	Law	Prudence
Celebration	Disappointment	Goodness	Liberty	Reality
Challenge	Disaster	Gossip	Life	Rebellion
Chance	Disbelief	Grace	Loneliness	Redempti
Chaos	Dishonesty	Graciousness	Loss	Relaxatio
Charisma	Disillusionment	Gratitude	Love	Reliabilit
Charity	Disloyalty	Greed	Loyalty	Relief
Charm	Distance	Grief	Luck	Resentme
Clarity	Distraction	Grudges	Luxury	Resilienc
Coldness	Dominance	Guilt	Masculinity	Resource
Comfort	doubt	Happiness	Maturity	Respite
Commitment	Dread	Hate	Memory	Responsi
Communication	Dreams	Hatred	Mercy	Revenge
Compassion	Drive	Healing	Misery	Rivalry
Complaining	Duty	Heartbreak	Motivation	Romance
Confidence	Ego	Helpfulness	Mystery	Rumor
Confusion	Elegance	Helplessness	Necessity	Sanctuar

Pride and Prejudice Word Blank Activity

Parts of Speech for *Pride and Prejudice* excerpt.

THE JANE AUSTEN BOOK CLUB

1. Noun	2. Verb ending in -ed	3. Adjective	4. Noun
5. Noun	6. Location	7. Noun	8. Plural noun
9. Adjective	10. Plural noun	11. Adjective	12. Adjective
13. Noun	14. Verb	15. Adverb	16. Verb ending in -ing
17. Nickname	18. Location	19. Adjective	20. Noun
21. Place	22. Mode of transportation	23. Emotion	24. Holiday
25. Plural noun	26. Set of opposite adjectives, opposite 1	27. Opposite 2	28. Adjective
29. Adjective	30. Verb ending with -ing	31. Exclamation	32. Verb
33. Verb			

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE, BY JANE AUSTEN & [your
name here]

It is a [noun] universally [verb ending in -ed], that a single

man in possession of a [adjective] [noun], must be in want of a [noun].

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a [location], this [noun] is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding [plural noun], that he is considered the [adjective] property of some one or other of their [plural noun].

“My [adjective] Mr. Bennet,” said his lady to him one day, “have you heard that Netherfield Park is [adjective] at last?”

Mr. Bennet replied that he had not.

“But it is,” returned she; “for Mrs. Long has just been here, and she told me all about it.”

Mr. Bennet made no [noun].

“Do you not want to [verb] who has taken it?” cried his wife [adverb].

“You want to tell me, and I have no objection to [verb ending in -ing] it.”

This was invitation enough.

“Why, my [nickname], you must know, Mrs. Long says that [location] is taken by a [adjective] man of large [noun] from the north of [place]; that he came down on Monday in a [mode of transportation] to see the place, and was so much [emotion] with it, that he agreed with Mr. Morris immediately; that he is to take possession before [holiday], and some of his [plural noun] are to be in the house by the end of next week.”

“What is his name?”

“Bingley.”

“Is he [opposite adjective 1] or [opposite adjective 2]?”

“Oh! [opposite adjective 2], my dear, to be sure! A [opposite adjective 2] man of large [noun]; four or five thousand a year. What a fine [noun] for our girls!”

“How so? How can it affect them?”

“My [adjective] Mr. Bennet,” replied his wife, “how can you be so [adjective]! You must know that I am thinking of his [verb ending with -ing] one of them.”

“Is that his design in settling here?”

“Design! [Exclamation], how can you [verb] so! But it is very likely that he may fall in love with one of them, and therefore you must [verb] him as soon as he comes.”