***Pride and Prejudice***

***Volume 1***

***Chapter 1***

***Brief Summary:***

Based on the inevitable conclusion that a single man must necessarily be in the pursuit of a wife, when Netherfield Park is rented to an eligible young bachelor of large fortune, Mrs. Bennet, who has five eligible young daughters, applies to her husband to go immediately to Netherfield to make a formal introduction of the family. When Mr. Bennet denies that he has any inclination to do so, Mrs. Bennet, as per her usual reaction to stress, disappointment, or emotion of any kind, begins to complain of her nerves. Chapter 1 introduces us to two key themes in the novel. Mr. Bennet is "so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve and caprice," that in twenty-three years of marriage Mrs. Bennet has still not learned to decipher his humor through his sarcasm, his love through his nonchalance. We learn that of his five daughters, Lizzie is his favorite, and that he makes no secret of the fact. Mrs. Bennet is a nervous woman of small intellect, whose main goal in life is to see her daughters marry well. Indeed, marrying well is the main theme of the entire novel, and the one that will occupy the hearts and minds of all of the main characters, both male and female. The subtext will seek to define exactly what "marrying well" should and did mean at that moment in history

***Summary in Detail:***

* Universal Truth #1 in nineteenth-century England: A rich, single man must [want a wife](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/pride-and-prejudice/themes/marriage). You have to leave the money to *someone*, after all.
* When a single gentleman with a [large fortune](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/pride-and-prejudice/themes/wealth) by the name of Bingley moves into a mansion called Netherfield Park, the news quickly spreads through the neighborhood via the neighborhood grapevine of gossipy women.
* [Mrs. Bennet](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/pride-and-prejudice/mrs-bennet)badgers her husband about [Mr. Bingley](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/pride-and-prejudice/charles-bingley): He's so rich! He's so single! He'd make a great husband for one of our five daughters! Quick, go become best friends with him.
* Mr. Bennet lets his wife do most of the talking, occasionally interjecting with some sarcastic wit such as: Well, gosh, you're so beautiful maybe Mr. Bingley will want you instead of our daughters.
* Mrs. Bennet fails to realize the sarcasm.
* We learn that Mrs. Bennet's only occupation in life is to get her daughters married.
* We also get the impression that Mrs. Bennet is (how do we put this delicately?) really annoying.

***Synopsis:***

The novel begins at Longbourn, at the Bennet family estate. The Bennets are immersed in an in-depth conversation about [Mr. Bingley](https://www.gradesaver.com/pride-and-prejudice/study-guide/character-list#mr-bingley), "a single man of large fortune" who is soon to inhabit the nearby estate of Netherfield Park.

[Mrs. Bennet](https://www.gradesaver.com/pride-and-prejudice/study-guide/character-list#mrs-bennet) hopes that Mr. Bingley will be a potential suitor for one of her daughters. She desperately wants her husband to visit him, hoping that will spark an acquaintance. [Mr. Bennet](https://www.gradesaver.com/pride-and-prejudice/study-guide/character-list#mr-bennet) remains aloof, however, and refuses to commit. His attitude infuriates his wife, whose primary life concern is finding husbands for her daughters.

There are five daughters in the Bennet family (from oldest to youngest): [Jane](https://www.gradesaver.com/pride-and-prejudice/study-guide/character-list#jane), [Elizabeth](https://www.gradesaver.com/pride-and-prejudice/study-guide/character-list#elizabeth) [Mary](https://www.gradesaver.com/pride-and-prejudice/study-guide/character-list#mary), [Kitty](https://www.gradesaver.com/pride-and-prejudice/study-guide/character-list#kitty), and [Lydia](https://www.gradesaver.com/pride-and-prejudice/study-guide/character-list#lydia). It is clear from the beginning of the novel that Mr. Bennet prefers Elizabeth because of her practical nature. Mrs. Bennet, on the other hand, appears to be more fond of Jane because of her beauty, and of Lydia because of her good humor.

***Critical Study:***The novel opens with one of the most-quoted lines in English literature: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." The chapter then introduces the reader to the Bennet family of Longbourn, which includes Mr. and Mrs. Bennet and their five daughters, Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Catherine (Kitty), and Lydia. Mrs. Bennet announces the news that a wealthy gentleman named [Charles Bingley](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Pride-and-Prejudice/character-analysis/#Charles_Bingley) has moved into the neighborhood, to the grand estate of Netherfield Park. Mr. Bingley is unmarried; Mrs. Bennet asks her husband to call on Mr. Bingley so that his daughters can be properly introduced to the eligible bachelor.

With her opening line, [Austen](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Pride-and-Prejudice/author/) identifies the impetus for many of the events to come. Through the dialogue that follows, readers come to know Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. They learn Mrs. Bennet is singularly driven to get her daughters married, while [Mr. Bennet](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Pride-and-Prejudice/character-analysis/#Mr._Bennet) is a more nuanced character. His "humor, reserve, and caprice" have undoubtedly served him well in dealing with his less intelligent wife. Even after 23 years of marriage, Mrs. Bennet seems oblivious to her spouse's sarcasm.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part***

***Summary Part 1:***

The narrator begins with the statement: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." Then the narrator begins the story. One day in their modest house in Longbourn, [Mrs. Bennet](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/mrs-bennet) shares some news with her husband, [Mr. Bennet](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/mr-bennet). A wealthy young gentleman, [Charles Bingley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters), has just rented the nearby estate of Netherfield. Mrs. Bennet twitters with excitement because she wants him to meet her daughters and hopefully marry one.

***Analysis Part 1:***

One of the most famous lines in literature, the opening establishes the pursuit of marriage as central to the social world of the English gentry. In addition, the claim that a wealthy man must be looking for a wife shows how desperately important it was for women to marry wealthy men. In Austen's time, they had no other means of support.

***Summary Part 2:***[Mrs. Bennet](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/mrs-bennet) asks her husband to get them an introduction. [Mr. Bennet](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/mr-bennet) purposely frustrates his wife by sarcastically replying that he'll write to give his consent for [Bingley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters) to marry any of his daughters, especially [Elizabeth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/elizabeth-eliza-lizzy-bennet), whom he considers especially bright.

***Analysis Part 2:***

In terms of taking an interest in their daughters' futures, Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Bennet are polar opposites: she gets involved while he remains distant and makes jokes.

***Quotes:*It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.**

This is the first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* and stands as one of the most famous first lines in literature. Even as it briskly introduces the arrival of Mr. Bingley at Netherfield—the event that sets the novel in motion—this sentence also offers a miniature sketch of the entire plot, which concerns itself with the pursuit of “single men in possession of a good fortune” by various female characters. The preoccupation with socially advantageous marriage in nineteenth-century English society manifests itself here, for in claiming that a single man “must be in want of a wife,” the narrator reveals that the reverse is also true: a single woman, whose socially prescribed options are quite limited, is in (perhaps desperate) want of a husband.