***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.

## ***Notes for AP Study:***

***Pride and Prejudice*** is the most famous novel of the English author **Jane Austen**. The novel centers on **Elizabeth (Lizzy) Bennet**, and her family. Lizzy is the second oldest in a line of five daughters (**Jane**, Lizzy, Mary, Kitty, **Lydia**). In *Pride and Prejudice,* two handsome and rich bachelors—**Mr. Bingley** and **Mr. Darcy**—come to stay at **Netherfield Park**, near where the Bennet family lives. Mr. Bingley and Jane form a quick attachment but are torn apart for a brief time when Mr. Darcy convinces Bingley to leave. Darcy, at first, is rude to Lizzy, but he grows to love her. When he confesses his love, Lizzy is appalled. However, she comes to know his true nature. At the end of the novel, the two eldest Bennet sisters find happiness in their unions with Bingley and Darcy.

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| Jane Austen Pride and Prejudice Chapter 1 Summary |
| ***Jane Austen penned several famous novels, and Pride and Prejudice is the most popular of them.*** |

**Chapter 1** of *Pride and Prejudice* sets the tone for the rest of the novel. It introduces **Mrs.** and **Mr. Bennet**, and starts to develop their characters. The first chapter is a conversation between the husband and wife. Mrs. Bennet goes to her husband to say that Netherfield Park has been rented by someone new. She heard the news from Mrs. Long. Mrs. Bennet asks if Mr. Bennet wants to know who has taken the house. She tells him that the house has been taken by a wealthy man named Bingley from the northern part of England.

Mr. Bennet asks if the man is single or married, and Mrs. Bennet assures him that he is single, which is great for their daughters. Mr. Bennet questions why it affects them, and she says that Bingley will, of course, marry one of them. Mrs. Bennet is adamant that Mr. Bennet needs to go and visit Mr. Bingley as soon as he gets to town, but Mr. Bennet does not agree to the visit. He says his wife can go and that he will send a letter. He suggests the daughters go alone, even since Mrs. Bennet is so beautiful she might win Bingley's heart. The couple banter back and forth. Mr. Bennet does not relent, and he teases his wife through the end of the chapter. Likewise, Mrs. Bennet insists that Mr. Bennet needs to visit Mr. Bingley as soon as possible.

## *Pride and Prejudice* Chapter 1 Analysis

The personalities of Mrs. and Mr. Bennet and the dynamic of their relationship are laid bare in *Pride and Prejudice* Chapter 1. Mrs. Bennet is obsessed with getting her daughters married to rich husbands, which remains the most significant part of her personality throughout the entire novel. She is simple, obsessive, and anxious. She is a chronic over-thinker, who easily gets worked up, and she is gullible and easy to fool, which her husband takes advantage of to taunt her into further anxiety. She is both easy to dislike, given her annoying temperament and easy to pity, given that her patronizing husband exacerbates her anxiety.

Mr. Bennet is shown as a steady and calm man. He shows neither annoyance nor anger at his wife's nagging. He has a dry sense of humor, and he jests with his wife by pretending to deny her wishes. He knows that good marriages are the best paths for his daughters. In the following chapter, he does go to Netherfield Park and meet Mr. Bingley, as his wife requested. During the conversation with his wife, it is also revealed that Lizzy is Mr. Bennet's favorite daughter. He dislikes that four of his daughters are more like their mother, but Lizzy, who is sharp-witted and a reader, is much more like her father, and he feels closest with her because of this.

The Bennet's do not have a marriage based deeply in love. Later in the novel, the idea that Mr. Bennet regrets his choice in a wife is hinted at. As such, the Bennet's have a strained and rather unhappy marriage. Mrs. Bennet tries to get Mr. Bennet interested in things she believes are essential, such as the potential marriages of their daughters. Meanwhile, Mr. Bennet avoids his wife, and when he does talk with her, he is patronizing and tries to upset her. Their marriage shows why picking a well-suited spouse is important and what can happen when marriage is entered into lightly.

### In Want of a Wife

The first line of *Pride and Prejudice* is one of the best-known quotes of the book. It reads:

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

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| Pride and Prejudice First Page |
| ***The first sentence of Pride and Prejudice is one of the most quoted lines of the novel.*** |

The line prepares readers for what will follow in the text. *Pride and Prejudice* contains several single male characters looking for wives. Such characters include:

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| **Character** | **Love Interest(s)** | **Wife** |
| Mr. Darcy | He loves Lizzy but is expected to marry his cousin, Anne de Bourgh. | Lizzy Bennet |
| Mr. Bingley | He loves Jane Bennet but is expected to marry Georgiana Darcy. | Jane Bennet |
| Mr. Wickham | He tries to elope with Georgiana and flirts with Lizzy. | Lydia Bennet |
| Mr. Collins (the Bennet's cousin) | He shows interest in Jane and proposes to Jane. | Charlotte Lucas (Lizzy's friend) |

The line applies to all of the bachelors in *Pride and Prejudice.* Some of the characters, such as Mr. Collins or Mr. Wickham, are actively searching for wives, and they do not take time to consider what they are truly looking for in a spouse. Mr. Darcy, on the other hand, is not pursuing a wife, and he falls in love with Lizzy by chance.

### Wealth

Wealth in connection with marriage is stressed in the first chapter of *Pride and Prejudice.* Mrs. Bennet is interested in Mr. Bingley for one of her daughters because he is rich. She has no idea what sort of person he is outside of his salary. It does not matter to her what he looks like or what he acts like; she cares only that he is rich, single, and can provide one of her daughters with a comfortable life.

While this may seem shallow, Mrs. Bennet realizes the importance of wealth in a marriage. The novel is set in the early 1800s, during a time when women had minimal options. None of her daughters could make money on their own. Also, with five daughters to provide for, Mr. Bennet could not afford to supply them with large **dowries** (money or property from the bride's side). Mrs. Bennet wants the best for her daughters, and, in her perspective, that means wealthy husbands.

### Marriage

Although it is short, Chapter 1 reveals Austen's strong opinions on the importance of marriage. Austen alludes to the idea that the conventions of marriage and the hoops people must jump through are ridiculous. Mr. Bennet must visit the newest eligible bachelor, so his daughters can socialize with him. If they cannot properly meet him, they have no chance of marrying him.

The chapter also highlights the fact that marriage is an economic necessity for women. Mr. Bennet is not a very wealthy man, and he cannot afford to provide enough money for his daughters to live on for the rest of their lives. Their financial circumstances are countered later in the novel by Lady and Miss de Bourgh—a wealthy widow and her unmarried daughter. With enough money to live on, Miss de Bourgh does not need to pursue a husband to care for her.

The idea that marriage for the sake of marriage is dangerous is also presented in Chapter 1. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet rushed into marriage, and they each suffered as a result. Later, Lydia rushes into marriage with Mr. Wickham, not knowing his true backstory. Jane and Lizzy, however, do not make the same mistakes, and they are careful in selecting partners for themselves.

### *Pride and Prejudice* Chapter 1 Quotes

Mr. Bennet teases Mrs. Bennet that he will not go to see Mr. Bingley. He is playful, and he compliments her beauty in the process. He knows how to spin his patronizing jests.

* *"I see no occasion for that. You and the girls may go, or you may send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better, for as you are as handsome as any of them, Mr. Bingley might like you the best of the party."*

Mr. Bennet calls four of his daughters "silly and ignorant" but praises Lizzy as sharp and intelligent. Mrs. Bennet is upset with his attitude, and she thinks he is teasing her. While he is jesting, he is also telling the truth.

* *"Mr. Bennet, how can you abuse your own children in such a way? You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion on my poor nerves."*

Austen directly describes both Mrs. and Mr. Bennet at the close of the chapter, showing that she is using them, particularly the wife, to set a negative example.

* *"Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. Her mind was less difficult to develop, She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news."*

## Lesson Summary

**Chapter 1** of ***Pride and Prejudice*** details a conversation between **Mrs.** and **Mr. Bennet**. A man named **Mr. Bingley** is moving to **Netherfield Park** because he has rented the house. Mrs. Bennet wants Mr. Bennet to introduce himself so that their five daughters (**Jane**, **Lizzy**, Mary, Kitty, and **Lydia**) may be introduced. Mr. Bennet teases his wife, saying that he will not go, and Mrs. Bennet, believing his jests, gets upset.

Chapter 1 serves many roles in the novel. The first line—"*It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife"*—is one of the most-quoted lines of the book, and it sets the tone for the novel, which is a romance novel in which Lizzy, the heroine, and her sister, Jane, find happy unions with **Mr. Darcy** and Mr. Bingley. The first chapter reveals Mr. Bennet's dry humor and stoic attitude and shows his wife as a silly and anxious gossip. Their marriage was entered into without thought, and neither of them is particularly happy with the other. The chapter shows Austen's strong opinions on marriage, such as the fact that it is an economic necessity for women, that the social conventions surrounding marriage are ridiculous, and that it is dangerous to get married just for the sake of it. This chapter also stresses the importance of wealth in a husband. The Bennet daughters are not from a family rich enough to support them for the rest of their lives or to provide them each with a large **dowry** (money brought into a marriage by the bride). To have comfortable lives, the daughters must marry into wealth.

**Frequently Asked Questions**

#### What is Pride and Prejudice Chapter 1 about?

Chapter 1 in *Pride and Prejudice* is a conversation between Mrs. and Mr. Bennet. Mrs. Bennet is asking Mr. Bennet to visit Mr. Bingley when he comes to town, and Mr. Bennet says he will not go. Mrs. Bennet wants one of her daughters to marry Mr. Bingley.

#### What is the relationship between Mr and Mrs Bennet in Chapter 1?

Mr. and Mrs. Bennet do not appear to have the best relationship. Mrs. Bennet nags and annoys Mr. Bennet, while Mr. Bennet patronizes and worries her. Mr. Bennet is playful, and he calls his wife beautiful in his jesting, but their is a strained note to their conversation.

#### What does the first sentence of Pride and Prejudice mean?

The first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* serves to introduce the plot of the novel, which centers on the relationships between Lizzy and Mr. Darcy, and Jane and Mr. Bingley. Bingley and Darcy are both rich and single men. It also shows Mrs. Bennet's mindset, and she consistently pushes for her daughters to marry well-off men throughout the novel.

***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.