***Pride and Prejudice***

***Volume 1***

***Chapter 6***

***Summary in Detail:***

* Mrs. Hurst and [**Miss Bingley**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/pride-and-prejudice/miss-caroline-bingley), Mr. Bingley's sisters, despise [**Mrs. Bennet**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/pride-and-prejudice/mrs-bennet) and the younger daughters, preferring instead to spend time with [**Jane**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/pride-and-prejudice/jane-bennet)and [**Elizabeth**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/pride-and-prejudice/elizabeth-bennet).
* Jane is flattered, but Elizabeth still sees the sisters as simply being incredibly snooty.
* She also sees that Jane is falling for Bingley, but it's hard to tell because Jane is always perfectly composed.
* [**Charlotte**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/pride-and-prejudice/charlotte-lucas) thinks this is a bad move. She tells Lizzy that Jane had better show some interest in Bingley in order to keep him interested.
* Should they know each other better first?
* Nah, Charlotte says. There's plenty of time after the wedding to get acquainted.
* Elizabeth is so occupied watching Jane and [**Mr. Bingley**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/pride-and-prejudice/charles-bingley)that she doesn't notice when Mr. Darcy has begun to admire her. She does, however, notice him eavesdropping on her conversations. She doesn't like it —he has a "satirical eye," as she tells Charlotte.
* Charlotte's father, Sir Lucas, entreats Elizabeth to dance with [**Mr. Darcy**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/pride-and-prejudice/fitzwilliam-darcy), but she refuses.
* Mr. Darcy isn't exactly used to being refused, so that's pretty much the perfect way to get his attention.
* While Mr. Darcy is contemplating Elizabeth, Miss Bingley strolls up hoping for a good snark. Instead, Mr. Darcy says he has been having a nice time admiring Elizabeth Bennet.
* Oooh, Miss Bingley does not like that. We think someone might have designs on Mr. Darcy.

***Brief Summary:***

Though they do not care for Mrs. Bennet or the younger Bennet sisters, Bingley's sisters become acquainted with Jane and Elizabeth over the course of several visits. Jane is pleased by their attention, while Elizabeth remains critical of them. The Bennet sisters also see Bingley and Darcy on occasion.

When Elizabeth speaks to Charlotte about Bingley's affection for Jane, Charlotte tells Elizabeth that Jane must be more obvious about her affection, lest the "uniform cheerfulness of [her] manner" discourage Bingley. Charlotte believes that a woman should show more affection than she feels in order to attract a man, commenting that "happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance." Elizabeth is skeptical of both assertions.

During this period, Mr. Darcy grows interested in Elizabeth. He is attracted to her dark, intelligent eyes and the "easy playfulness" of her manner. At a dinner held by Sir William Lucas, Darcy eavesdrops on a conversation between Elizabeth and Sir William Lucas. Sir William, unaware of Darcy's affections, begs Elizabeth to dance with Darcy - but she steadfastly refuses. Darcy mentions his admiration for Elizabeth to [Caroline Bingley](https://www.gradesaver.com/pride-and-prejudice/study-guide/character-list#caroline-bingley). Caroline responds to his revelation by criticizing the Bennet family, but Darcy does not partake her the mockery.

### *Analysis: Chapters 1–6*

The opening chapters of [Pride and Prejudice](https://www.gradesaver.com/pride-and-prejudice) serve to quickly introduce Austen's principal characters and outline the skeleton of the plot. Austen expediently establishes her primary themes and the stylistic devices through which she will explore the narrative. The very first line of the novel has become one of the most famous first lines in literature: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." This opening line establishes the novel's two major themes - marriage and class (particularly as as defined by money). Most of the characters in *Pride and Prejudice* are first and foremost defined by their financial background and marital status. In these the early chapters, Austen explores the stark contrast between Mrs. Bennet and Elizabeth through their opinions on these issues. Mrs. Bennet only cares about marriage and money, while Elizabeth refuses to let these superficial measures control her.

The first line also introduces Austen's use of irony. While the first line focuses on "a single man . . . in want of a wife," Austen shows her readers over the course of the novel that in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, marriage was actually more crucial for young women. If a young woman of a certain class did not find a husband of decent means and status, she risked becoming a powerless and potentially destitute spinster. While Austen's choice of wording in this first line frames the man as the active force in seeking marriage, the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* emphasizes a woman's role in finding a suitable partner.

This irony leads to the central question surrounding Austen's intent in writing *Pride and Prejudice*. Was Austen conservative, poking fun at these institutions but ultimately approving of them, or was she progressive and subtly trying to upend those social restrictions? Neither answer has ever produced a scholarly consensus, largely because there is evidence in support of both interpretations. Austen attacks the purely economic, utilitarian motives for marriage as well as the societal constraints which leave many women with little choice but to marry. Yet the plot of *Pride and Prejudice* seems to suggest that happy unions can exist even within these strict cultural limitations.

In the conversation between Charlotte and Elizabeth in Chapter 5, Austen leads the reader to sympathize with Elizabeth, the novel's protagonist. She argues against the utilitarian motive for marriage and rejects the idea that a women must feign interest in order to secure a man. From a contemporary perspective, Charlotte's attitude is lamentable if not anti-feminist. She believes a woman should get married for the sake of security, which will then allow her the "leisure for falling in love as much as she chuses." Elizabeth speaks up in favor of individuality, refusing to consider that marriage should be founded on anything other than love and respect. While the reader naturally aligns with Elizabeth's opinion, Austen ultimately proves both of Charlotte's arguments to be true. As a result of rejecting Charlotte's advice, Jane almost loses Bingley. Additionally, many moments in Elizabeth's journey towards her relationship with Darcy suggest the importance of class in marriage, at least to some degree.

Critics have praised Austen's ability to bring her characters to life. Critic George Henry Lewes lauds Austen because "instead of description, the common and easy resource of novelists, she has the rare and difficult art of dramatic presentation instead of telling us what her characters are, and what they feel, she presents the people, and they reveal themselves." For example, the reader's first glimpse of the Bennets provides a fairly accurate sketch of their individual characters. Mrs. Bennett is chatty, frivolous, and obsessed with marrying off her daughters, while Mr. Bennett is rather detached. Jane is beautiful and amiable, always believing the best about people. Elizabeth, good-looking but not as beautiful as her sister, has a sharp wit and prides herself on her keen sense of perception. Lydia and Kitty are frivolous like their mother, and Mary is scholarly and humorless.

These initial characterizations motivate the novel's plot. Jane's good nature is partly responsible for her trouble with Bingley. Because Jane is so pleasant to everyone, Darcy is later able to convince his friend that Jane is not particularly interested in him. Throughout the novel, Mrs. Bennet remains "a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper," but as the girls lose their prospects of marriage, it becomes clear that her excessive insistence is not entirely unfounded. She knows that if her daughters do not marry, their lives could be ruined. Finally, Elizabeth's keen wit will ultimately be her own worst enemy, as it leads her to express a sense of pride that rivals Darcy's. This quality proves to both Elizabeth's strength and her weakness, and her struggle with her pride paves her character arc.

The Meryton ball introduces the novel's two main couples and foreshadows the distinct ways in which each relationship will develop. Jane and Bingley are attracted to each other from the outset, and they both have simple, amiable, and easy-going personalities. However, Bingley needs to wait for his sisters' approval before feeling "authorised" to like Jane. This shows that Bingley is easily influenced by others' opinions and foreshadows the difficulties he and Jane will face. Elizabeth and Darcy, on the other hand, each have unfavorable first impressions of each other. In fact, Austen originally titled the novel *First Impressions* because she wanted to explore the difficulty of changing one person's initial assessment of another. Because of his pride and extreme class-consciousness, Darcy refuses to even consider Elizabeth as a dancing partner. And yet, Elizabeth is equally quick to judge Darcy. Elizabeth is not even aware of the fact that she is overly confident about the accuracy of her perceptions. In fact, Darcy's refusal offends Elizabeth's vanity more than she admits. This incident is the first time that Mary's central argument from Chapter 5 becomes clear: pride is how we view ourselves, and vanity is how others view us.

Austen provides insight into the stony Darcy through his conversation with Caroline Bingley. While both characters are extremely class-conscious, only Caroline makes the tasteless statement that rural "society" is "insupportable." When Darcy comments that Elizabeth's "fine eyes" please him, he shows a willingness - however nascent - to see a person beyond her class limitations. Once Caroline realizes that Darcy is interested in Elizabeth, she insinuates that the Bennet family - especially Mrs. Bennet - would be embarrassing in society. Darcy does not fully disagree, revealing that he possesses more decency than Caroline. And yet, this conversation underlines the theme that personal prejudices are more difficult to transcend than class differences.

***Analysis:***The relationship between Jane and [Elizabeth Bennet](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Pride-and-Prejudice/character-analysis/#Elizabeth_Bennet) and the Bingley sisters progresses as the women of the two households make their customary visits. The Bingley sisters appear to approve of Jane, but they find Mrs. Bennet intolerable and the younger sisters dull.

At a party at Lucas Lodge, Sir William Lucas's estate, Charlotte and Elizabeth discuss Jane. While Elizabeth is pleased by Jane's modesty and discretion, Charlotte warns that Jane should make her feelings toward Bingley more obvious. After all, he needs some sign that his feelings are reciprocated.

Elizabeth does not change her initial impressions of Darcy. She does make an effort to speak with him at the party so that she does not "grow afraid of him." Later, she also performs some songs on the pianoforte, followed by her sister Mary. After the performance, when Darcy asks her to dance, she refuses, protesting that he is "all politeness." Darcy admits to Caroline that he finds Elizabeth attractive, and Caroline teases him about what a marriage to Elizabeth would entail—Mrs. Bennet as a mother-in-law.

The conversation between Charlotte and Elizabeth about Jane highlights the fine line women of the day had to walk. They had to be discreet in courtship, protecting their ladylike reputation in order to remain marriageable, but they also had to somehow communicate their attraction to a prospective mate. As usual, Charlotte is the voice of practicality in this conversation; she is worried that Jane will lose her chance for an advantageous marriage. This discussion foreshadows a future conflict for Jane.

Elizabeth's refusal to dance with Darcy shows her self-control and her wit. She is not willing to jump at the first chance to dance with someone who had previously snubbed her, however wealthy he may be. Furthermore, she actively dislikes him. In calling Darcy "all politeness," she suggests playfully that he is only asking her out of a sense of propriety, not because of any real desire. In conversation with Caroline Bingley, Darcy reveals his changing attitude toward Elizabeth; he now finds her attractive. Caroline persists in denigrating the Bennets' lower status, probably because she is interested in the eligible Mr. Darcy for herself. Caroline Bingley's designs on Darcy will influence events to come.

***Synopsis:***

The Miss. Bennets soon wait on the ladies of Netherfield, and the visit is soon returned. Although the Miss. Bingleys have made it clear that Mrs. Bennet and the younger Miss. Bennets are completely intolerable to them, they have made it known that they welcome a friendship with the two older daughters. However, Elizabeth is not blinded to their obvious snobbishness by their allusion to a developing friendship between them. She understands that the gesture comes directly from Mr. Bingley's regard for Jane, and that the Bingley ladies have little or no real inclination towards friendship for Jane, and for herself even less so. She is comforted by the fact that Jane is by nature guarded and discreet in showing excessive feelings for potential suitors, and that any efforts made by the Bingley sisters are in fact tributes to Mr. Bingley's regard for Jane.

Elizabeth is so concerned for the well-being of her sister, that she is unaware of becoming increasingly an object of interest in the eyes of Mr. Darcy. Whereas at first glance he had dismissed her, upon further reflection he begins to discern how her intelligence, wit and sensibility could be read upon her face, more than compensating for the fact that she was not the beauty Jane was, although a handsome girl in her own right. He begins to listen to her conversations when they are at events together, and one night, at a gathering at the Lucas' house, Elizabeth perceives he is listening to her. In her usual direct manner, she confronts him, and when Sir William Lucas interrupts their conversation, asking Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy if they will dance together, she flatly refuses and moves on to another part of the room. Mr. Darcy is further intrigued, and when Miss. Bingley approaches him later in the evening, he mentions his high regard of Elizabeth to her. She is astonished, and snidely begins to criticize Elizabeth and her family.

When Elizabeth mentions the fact that Jane is guarded in her emotions to Charlotte Lucas, who is a close friend of hers, Charlotte advises her that this is not a wise decision on Jane's part, conscious or unconscious. She admonishes that if Mr. Bingley is ever to find the courage to take their budding relationship to the next step, he must see some encouragement from Jane, and more than simply the same amiability she shows to everyone. Elizabeth counters that Jane herself is not even certain of her feelings for Bingley, having known him less than a fortnight, to which Charlotte replies, "when she is secure of him, there will be leisure for falling in love as much as she chooses." This sentiment is indicative of the time in which the novel takes place, when all any woman can hope for is to marry well, meaning into a family of good reputation and large fortune. It is beyond Charlotte's comprehension that feelings should come into the equation at all, and this foreshadows the situation that Charlotte will find herself in later in the novel.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Bingley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters)'s sisters soon start exchanging visits with [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/jane-bennet) and [Elizabeth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/elizabeth-eliza-lizzy-bennet). Elizabeth suspects they are only nice to Jane because of Bingley, whose admiration for Jane seems to grow with every meeting.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Social interaction among gentry had to follow precise guidelines, making it difficult to discern how people really felt. Elizabeth must read between the lines.

***Summary Part 2:***Suspecting that [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/jane-bennet) is falling in love, [Elizabeth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/elizabeth-eliza-lizzy-bennet) admires her sister's composure. She privately mentions it to [Charlotte Lucas](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters), who warns that women who don't show their affection risk losing the objects of it. Elizabeth considers this attitude too businesslike; besides, Jane can't know her true feelings yet. Charlotte replies that happiness in marriage happens only by chance.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Elizabeth believes that an individual should act with dignity and follow his or her feelings. In Charlotte's view, one's dignity and emotions must come second to the pragmatic concerns of finding financial security through marriage.

***Summary Part 3:***Meanwhile, as he spends more time with her, [Darcy](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/fitzwilliam-darcy) begins to notice [Elizabeth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/elizabeth-eliza-lizzy-bennet)'s beauty and verve. At a party, [Sir William Lucas](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters) tries to set up Darcy and Elizabeth to dance, but she refuses. Later, Darcy tells [Caroline](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters) that Elizabeth has captured his admiration, though to Caroline's relief he seems to show no interest in marrying Elizabeth and gaining Mrs. Bennet as a mother-in-law.

***Analysis Part 3:***Darcy was prejudiced against Elizabeth because of her lower social standing, but time and exposure starts to change his first impressions. This shift shows Darcy's capacity to change. Even so, he still deplores Elizabeth's family's behavior and can't imagine joining their family through marriage.