***Pride and Prejudice***

***Volume 1***

***Chapter 8***

***Summary in Detail:***

* [**Elizabeth**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/pride-and-prejudice/elizabeth-bennet) is back to hating when she realizes that the only time the sisters care about Jane is when she's around—not when she's upstairs in bed, sick.
* [**Miss Bingley**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/pride-and-prejudice/miss-caroline-bingley) is preoccupied with (1) capturing Mr. Darcy's attention and (2) ragging on Lizzy behind her back.
* They totally don't believe she walked three miles just to help her sister. On top of that —horror of horrors —her petticoat was dirty when she arrived because she walked all that way through the mud.
* Both the dudes defend her, but the women are too busy laughing about the fact that the Bennets have relatives who live in Cheapside, an unfashionable neighborhood in London. Apparently that totally dooms their marriage prospects.
* When Elizabeth comes back, they move onto other conversation topics. Like [**Mr. Darcy's**](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/pride-and-prejudice/fitzwilliam-darcy)accomplished little sister.
* So, what does it mean to be "accomplished," anyway?
* A lot, apparently. Mr. Darcy suggests that very few women are truly accomplished —he himself knows of only about half a dozen that fit the definition. Miss Bingley defines such a woman as able to sing, draw, and dance, while Mr. Darcy adds that, on top of all of that, she should read a lot—and not [***Twilight***](https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/twilight), either. You know, serious stuff. Award-winning stuff.
* Elizabeth rolls her eyes. She doesn't know any woman who has all those qualities of elegance, education, and taste. (Apparently, she's never met Gwyneth Paltrow.)

***Brief Summary:***

Dinner at Netherfield is for Elizabeth an insufferable experience that night. While she is grateful for Mr. Bingley's obvious concern for her sister, Miss. Bingley and Mrs. Hurst (Mr. Bingley's married sister) have no concern whatsoever for Jane when she is not immediately in front of them. As soon as she has finished eating, Elizabeth excuses herself to return to Jane's bedside. The minute she has left the room Miss. Bingley begins abusing her, finding her manners to be bad, a mixture of "pride and impertinence," and lacking in "conversation, style, taste and beauty." Both Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy speak in Elizabeth's defense, but Miss. Bingley is not to be silenced, and although Mrs. Hurst speaks of Jane fondly, it is not without constant reference to her poor connections.

After dinner, we learn that Elizabeth has been correct in her assessment of the Bingley women, that their kindness to Jane and Elizabeth is little more than an act meant to appease their brother in the short term, and they do not really care for either Jane or Elizabeth. We also learn that Miss. Bingley has high regard for Mr. Darcy, and tries hard to make herself agreeable to him, to little avail.

### *Analysis(Ch 5-8):*

The Bennets’ neighbors are Sir William Lucas, his wife, and their children. The eldest of these children, [Charlotte](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/pride/character/charlotte-lucas/), is [Elizabeth](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/pride/character/elizabeth-bennet/)’s closest friend. The morning after the ball, the women of the two families discuss the evening. They decide that while Bingley danced with Charlotte first, he considered Jane to be the prettiest of the local girls. The discussion then turns to [Mr. Darcy](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/pride/character/fitzwilliam-darcy/), and Elizabeth states that she will never dance with him; everyone agrees that Darcy, despite his family and fortune, is too proud to be likable.

Bingley’s sisters exchange visits with the Bennets and attempt to befriend Elizabeth and [Jane](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/pride/character/jane-bennet-and-charles-bingley/). Meanwhile, [Bingley](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/pride/character/jane-bennet-and-charles-bingley/) continues to pay attention to Jane, and Elizabeth decides that her sister is “in a way to be very much in love” with him but is concealing it very well. She discusses this with Charlotte Lucas, who comments that if Jane conceals it too well, Bingley may lose interest. Elizabeth says it is better for a young woman to be patient until she is sure of her feelings; Charlotte disagrees, saying that it is best not to know too much about the faults of one’s future husband.

Darcy finds himself attracted to Elizabeth. He begins listening to her conversations at parties, much to her surprise. At one party at the Lucas house, Sir William attempts to persuade Elizabeth and Darcy to dance together, but Elizabeth refuses. Shortly afterward, Darcy tells Bingley’s unmarried sister that “Miss Elizabeth Bennet” is now the object of his admiration.

The reader learns that [Mr. Bennet’s](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/pride/character/mr-bennet/) property is entailed, meaning that it must pass to a man after Mr. Bennet’s death and cannot be inherited by any of his daughters. His two youngest children, Catherine (nicknamed Kitty) and [Lydia](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/pride/character/lydia-bennet/), entertain themselves by beginning a series of visits to their mother’s sister, Mrs. Phillips, in the town of Meryton, and gossiping about the militia stationed there.

One night, while the Bennets are discussing the soldiers over dinner, a note arrives inviting Jane to Netherfield Park for a day. [Mrs. Bennet](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/pride/character/mrs-bennet/) conspires to send Jane by horse rather than coach, knowing that it will rain and that Jane will consequently have to spend the night at Mr. Bingley’s house. Unfortunately, their plan works out too well: Jane is soaked, falls ill, and is forced to remain at Netherfield as an invalid. Elizabeth goes to visit her, hiking over on foot. When she arrives with soaked and dirty stockings she causes quite a stir and is certain that the Bingleys hold her in contempt for her soiled clothes. Jane insists that her sister spend the night and the Bingleys consent.

That night, while Elizabeth visits Jane, the Bingley sisters poke fun at the Bennets. Darcy and Mr. Bingley defend them, though Darcy concedes, first, that he would not want his sister ever to go out on such a walking expedition and, second, that the Bennets’ lack of wealth and family make them poor marriage prospects. When Elizabeth returns to the room, the discussion turns to Darcy’s library at his ancestral home of Pemberley and then to Darcy’s opinions on what constitutes an “accomplished woman.” After he and Bingley list the attributes that such a woman would possess, Elizabeth declares that she “never saw such capacity, and taste, and application, and elegance, as you describe, united,” implying that Darcy is far too demanding.

The introduction of the Lucases allows Austen to comment on the pretensions that accompany social rank. Recently knighted, Sir William is described as having felt his new distinction “a little too strongly” and moved away from town in order to “think with pleasure of his own importance.” Sir William remains a sympathetic figure despite his snobbery, but the same cannot be said of Bingley’s sister, whose class-consciousness becomes increasingly evident. Awareness of class difference is a pressing reality in *Pride and Prejudice*. This awareness colors the attitudes that characters of different social status feel toward one another. This awareness cuts both ways: as Darcy and Elizabeth demonstrate, the well-born and the socially inferior prove equally likely to harbor prejudices that blind them to others’ true natures.

[Read more about class as a theme.](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/pride/themes/)

Charlotte Lucas’s observation that Jane does not display her affection for Bingley illuminates the careful structure of the novel. Darcy notices the same reticence in Jane, but he assumes that she is not in love with Bingley. Charlotte’s conversation with Elizabeth, then, foreshadows Darcy’s justification for separating Bingley from Jane. Similarly, the author prepares the reader for subsequent developments in other relationships: Charlotte’s belief that it is better not to know one’s husband too well foreshadows her “practical” marriage to Collins, while Elizabeth’s more romantic view anticipates her refusal of two proposals that might have been accepted by others.

[Read more about Austen’s use of foreshadowing.](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/pride/foreshadowing/)

As in *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen emphasizes the matter of entailment in order to create a sense of urgency about the search for a husband. Though Jane is the eldest child in a fairly well-off family, her status as a woman precludes her from enjoying the success her father has experienced. When her father dies, the estate will turn over to Mr. Collins, the oldest male relative. The mention of entailment stresses not just the value society places on making a good marriage but also the way that the structures of society make a good marriage a prerequisite for a “good” life (the connotation of “good” being wealthy). Austen thus offers commentary on the plight of women. Through both law and prescribed gender roles, Austen’s society leaves women few options for the advancement or betterment of their situations.

[Read more about gender as a theme.](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/pride/themes/)

Language proves of central importance to relationships in *Pride and Prejudice*, as Austen uses conversation to reveal character. The interactions between Darcy and Elizabeth primarily take the forms of banter and argument, and Elizabeth’s words provide Darcy access to a deeper aspect of her character, one that appeals to him and allows him to begin to move past his initial prejudice. While their disagreement over the possibility of a “perfect” woman reinforces his apparent egotism and self-absorption, it also gives Elizabeth a chance to shine in debate. Whereas she does not live up to Darcy’s physical and social requirements for a perfect woman, she exceeds those concerning the “liveliness” of the perfect woman’s mind.

[Read more about Elizabeth and Darcy’s “accomplished woman” debate.](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/pride/key-questions-and-answers/#according-to-mr-darcy-what-qualities-make-a-woman-accomplished)

The novel begins to undermine the reader’s negative impression of Darcy by contrasting him with Miss Bingley. Though his arrogance remains unpleasant, he is unwilling to join in Miss Bingley’s snobbish dismissals of Elizabeth and her family. Like Lady Catherine de Bourgh later on, Miss Bingley serves as the voice of “society,” criticizing Elizabeth’s middle-class status and lack of social connections. Also like Lady Catherine, her primary motivation is jealousy: just as Lady Catherine wants Darcy to marry her niece, Miss Bingley wants him for herself. Both women exhibit spite colored by self-interest.

***Critical Analysis:***After dinner, Elizabeth leaves the table to attend to Jane, and the party begins to talk about her. Caroline harshly criticizes Elizabeth's pride and stubborn independence, but Mr. Bingley and Darcy admire her devotion to Jane. The Bingley sisters also deride the Bennets's low family connections. Bingley does not seem to care about the Bennets's social standing, although Darcy considers lowly status an impediment to the Bennet girls' chances of marrying well.

After Jane falls asleep, Elizabeth joins the others in the drawing room and participates in a conversation about what it means for a woman to be accomplished. Throughout the debate, Elizabeth and Darcy frequently disagree, although they argue with great wit. Darcy and Caroline provide unrealistic criteria for a woman to be considered accomplished, inciting Elizabeth to exclaim that she has never met such a woman in her life.

***Critical Study:***During dinner at Netherfield, the conversations are strained, and Elizabeth feels uncomfortable. Mr. Bingley and Darcy, however, express their admiration for Elizabeth, to Caroline's irritation.

The Bingley sisters continue to behave politely toward Elizabeth when in her presence, but she senses their true feelings about her; her willingness to bear an uncomfortable journey on foot may not be fitting for a proper lady. However, as the sisters make snide remarks behind Elizabeth's back, Mr. Darcy is learning to appreciate Elizabeth in new ways. He admires her wit and conversational ability. He appreciates her ability to express her ideas clearly.

In discussions about what makes a woman accomplished, Darcy is struck by Elizabeth's intelligence. Caroline Bingley is too ready to agree with anything he says. Against her intentions, Caroline Bingley may be helping to bring Darcy and Elizabeth together. This chapter reveals that Darcy is not one to just accept what is expected or usual—directly contrary to Elizabeth's initial impression of him. He clearly appreciates Elizabeth, who does not seem impressed by his wealth.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

During the conversation at dinner, [Elizabeth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/elizabeth-eliza-lizzy-bennet) accepts, but sees through, the empty concern that [Mrs. Hurst](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters) and [Caroline](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters) show for Jane. Still, she is grateful to [Bingley](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters) for his sincere interest in [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/jane-bennet).

***Analysis Part 1:***

Elizabeth continues to value character over class. She seems to have good intuition about people's true character.

***Summary Part 2:***When [Elizabeth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/elizabeth-eliza-lizzy-bennet) returns upstairs, [Mrs. Hurst](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters) and [Caroline](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters) criticize her looks, manners, and judgment. Mrs. Hurst says she does really like [Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/jane-bennet), but that her family situation—having few connections and no money—will block her hopes of making a good match. [Darcy](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/fitzwilliam-darcy) agrees.

***Analysis Part 2:***

The high class women show their prejudice. Though Mrs. Hurst speaks as if in sympathy with Jane, she's deviously trying to ruin the chances of either Bennet sister by mentioning their "family situation."

***Summary Part 3:***[Elizabeth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/elizabeth-eliza-lizzy-bennet) returns downstairs in the evening, choosing to look through some books instead of joining in cards. [Caroline](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters), who has been absorbed with [Darcy](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/fitzwilliam-darcy), asks him about his estate, Pemberley, and about his sister, who she deems a very accomplished woman. Darcy says he knows few women who are really accomplished. [Elizabeth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/elizabeth-eliza-lizzy-bennet) asks his definition of the term and, stunned by the long list of qualifications, expresses witty surprise that Darcy could know anyone who with all of those characteristics.

***Analysis Part 3:***By choosing books over the social fluff of cards, Elizabeth shows her inner substance. Plus she has the common sense to recognize the foolishness of society's unreasonable ideals about women. And she has the courage to say so in company. These characteristics distinguish her more than useless accomplishments would.

***Summary Part 4:***When [Elizabeth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters/elizabeth-eliza-lizzy-bennet) leaves again, [Caroline](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pride-and-prejudice/characters) accuses her of using mean tactics to raise her own status.

***Analysis Part 4:***Ironic, because that's actually what Caroline is doing. Caroline wants Darcy, and puts down others to elevate herself in his eyes.