

"A young man with a large fortune is coming to live at Netherfield Park! His name is Bingley and he is single! What a fine thing for our girls!"



Pride and Prejudice is a book about marriage. Mrs Bennet's main goal in life is to have five married daughters. But why was marriage so important to women at that time?

Money

In Jane Austen's time, money was extremely important. Young ladies, like the Bennet sisters, did not work or have their own money. They had to stay with their families until they got married. This put a lot of pressure on women to accept proposals of marriage, especially from rich men.

Elizabeth's friend, Charlotte Lucas, is neither pretty nor rich. At 27 years old, she is also getting too old to be single. She accepts Mr Collins's proposal, because she wants a home and a husband. Her own romantic feelings have nothing to do with her choice.

The Bennet family and their friends are not rich, like Mr Darcy and the Bingleys. Mr Bennet's estate will go to Mr Collins when he dies, as there are no sons. With no real money or property, the Bennet sisters have to depend on their good looks and natural charm to find a husband – and a place to live.

Love & Marriage

in Regency England*



* The Regency period is the time between 1811 and 1820. King George III's son, the Prince Regent, ruled at that time.

Make a list of the characters in *Pride and Prejudice* who are married. What kind of marriages do they have, do you think? Are they happy?

Being respectable

In Regency England, respectable unmarried women did not spend time alone with men. When Lydia runs away with Wickham, it is one of the worst things to happen to the Bennet family. Usually this would mean that no respectable gentlemen would want to marry any of the other sisters. Luckily, Mr Darcy's money and love for Elizabeth save the family's good name.



Finding a husband

How did young men and women meet and become engaged in Jane Austen's time? Dances were very important. Men could show interest in a woman by dancing with her several times at a ball.

Men and women could also visit each other. The girl's mother, or a married female relative, would always be at any meeting. Young women could also invite each other to their homes. In this way, Jane spends time with Bingley at Netherfield at the start of *Pride and Prejudice*.

Even when a couple were engaged, they couldn't spend lots of time alone together. Engagements were short. Often when people got married, they didn't really know their husband or wife at all. Lots of marriages in the 18th and 19th centuries were very unhappy for this reason.

What do these words mean? You can use a dictionary.
 pressure especially property charm
 respectable period