ELIZABETH BENNET

ELIZABETH'S ROLE IN THE NOVEL

Elizabeth Bennet is the second eldest of the five Bennet sisters, who at the beginning of the novel are all unmarried. She is the **heroine** and events are frequently viewed from her perspective. In the novel, she:

- meets Darcy at a local ball and immediately takes a dislike to him
- rejects Mr Collins's proposal of marriage, even though acceptance would guarantee financial security for herself and a future home for others in her family
- is immediately charmed by the handsome Wickham and believes his account of ill treatment by Darcy
- refuses Darcy's first offer of marriage and accuses him of not being 'gentleman-like' (Vol. 2, Ch. 12, p. 160)
- begins to revise her opinions on reading Darcy's letter of explanation; later visits Pemberley, Darcy's estate, and finds she has been completely mistaken about him
- resists Lady Catherine's attempts to bully her and marries Darcy on the same day as her sister Jane marries Darcy's friend Bingley.

TOP TIP AO1

It is often revealing to see a character from another character's point of view. Elizabeth is the first of the Bennet sisters named in the novel. Her father offers to 'throw in a good word' for her (Vol. 1, Ch. 1, p. 2). Her mother is offended and describes her in negative terms – 'not half so handsome as Jane, nor half so good-humoured as Lydia.' Her father mentions her quality of 'quickness'. Here we learn what different qualities the Bennet parents value as well as getting to know the novel's heroine.

ELIZABETH'S IMPORTANCE TO THE NOVEL AS A WHOLE

As the central **character** of the novel it is through Elizabeth's eyes that we see the vast majority of events. She is capable of making mistakes and wrong judgements but is intelligent, self-critical and capable of development. She is lively and observant as well as sensitive but restricted by her family and her neighbourhood and by the absence of opportunities for a young lady of her class. You may enjoy Elizabeth's **dialogue** and admire her for being quick enough to defend herself while (usually) remaining polite. Elizabeth and the **narrator** often seem very close in their attitudes and Austen presents her sympathetically even when she is wrong. However strong Charlotte Lucas's sensible arguments on marriage, it is Elizabeth's romance that dominates the story.

EXAM FOCUS: WRITING ABOUT ELIZABETH AO1

Key point	Evidence
• Elizabeth is less immediately attractive or less fun loving than some of her sisters, though she has a strong sense of humour.	• 'she is not half so handsome as Jane, nor half so good humoured as Lydia' (Vol. 1, Ch. 1, p. 2). • 'I dearly love a laugh' (Vol. 1, Ch. 11, p. 46).
• When necessary, she is prepared to be unladylike and unconventional.	• 'Elizabeth continued her walk alone, crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles' (Vol. 1, Ch. 7, p. 26).
• Darcy recognises that her expressive face reveals a lively mind.	• Her face 'was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes' (Vol. 1, Ch. 6, p. 17).
• She has the intelligence and wisdom to gain Darcy's respect.	• 'You taught me a lesson [...] By you I was properly humbled' (Vol. 3, Ch. 16, p. 306).
• Elizabeth is observant. The reader often watches her watching others and shares her feelings.	• At the Netherfield ball 'had her family made an agreement to expose themselves as much as they could [...] it would have been impossible for them to play their parts with [...] finer success' (Vol. 3, Ch 18, p. 85).

TOP TIP: WRITING ABOUT ELIZABETH AS HEROINE AO1

Make sure you explain how Austen places Elizabeth at the centre of the novel. Focus on key aspects of her character and where they are most clearly illustrated: her lively intelligence (Vol. 1, Ch. 11–12); her strong-mindedness (Vol. 1, Ch. 19; Vol. 2, Ch. 11; Vol. 3, Ch. 14); her readiness to acknowledge her misjudgements (Vol. 2, Ch. 13; Vol. 3, Ch. 1–2); her embarrassment about her family (Vol. 1, Ch. 18; Vol. 3, Ch. 4–6). Also make clear how often other characters and events are seen from Elizabeth's point of view – which is often very close to the narrator's (Vol. 1, Ch. 10; Vol. 2, Ch. 5).

REVISION FOCUS: ELIZABETH'S CHANGE OF HEART

To help you track the way Austen develops Elizabeth's character ask yourself these questions:

- Why does she take against Darcy so quickly? Why is she so ready to believe Wickham? Why does she reject Darcy's first proposal? (How often has she felt shame for her family before Darcy gives his point of view?)

RESPONDING TO WRITERS' EFFECTS

The two most important assessment objectives are **AO1** and **AO2**. They are about *what* writers do (the choices they make, and the effects these create), *what* your ideas are (your analysis and interpretation), and *how* you write about them (how well you explain your ideas).

ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVE 1

What does it say?	What does it mean?	Dos and Don'ts
Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to: • maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response • use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.	You must: • Use some of the literary terms you have learned (correctly!) • Write in a professional way (not a sloppy, chatty way) • Show you have thought for yourself • Back up your ideas with examples, including quotations	**Don't write:** *Jane is a really nice character. Austen uses lots of nice words to describe her. She's got an 'affectionate heart'.* **Do write:** *Austen presents Jane throughout the novel as a loving, and decent person, for example when she is described as having an 'affectionate heart' in the final chapter. The adjective 'affectionate' signals her kind nature.*

IMPROVING YOUR CRITICAL STYLE

Use a variety of words and phrases to show effects:

Austen suggests ..., conveys ..., implies ..., explores ..., demonstrates ..., signals ..., describes how ..., shows how ....

I/we (as readers) infer ..., recognise ..., understand ..., question ....

For example, look at these two alternative paragraphs by different students about Lady Catherine. Note the difference in the quality of expression:

Student A:

Austen says that Lady Catherine is really horrible to Lizzie when they talk in, Volume 3 Chapter 14. She says to Lizzie, 'Do you pay no regard to the wishes of his friends?'. This means that Lizzie has to do what Darcy's friends want. This means that Lady Catherine is more interested in what people say and not true love. Austen is saying Darcy's friends will be upset too.

This sounds as if Jane Austen is speaking!

It could 'mean' this, but there are other possibilities

Avoid using 'say' or 'saying' all the time

Very chatty and informal

Repetitive – better to use an alternative word or phrase

Student B:

Austen presents Lady Catherine in an unpleasant light when she speaks to Elizabeth in Volume 3, Chapter 14. She demonstrates her snobbish attitude to Elizabeth with the rhetorical question, 'Do you pay no regard to the wishes of his friends?' The phrase 'wishes of his friends' implies that she places social privilege above personal happiness. Austen also seems to be saying that Elizabeth will upset Darcy's close circle if she pursues the relationship.

Fits with idea of overall way in which Lady Catherine is shown

Good variety of vocabulary

Helps introduce an interpretation – not saying 'this is what it means'

Clear and precise language

Using 'seems' allows exploration of idea – not stating it bluntly as fact

ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVE 2

What does it say?	What does it mean?	Dos and Don'ts
Analyse the language, form and structure used by the writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.	'Analyse' – comment **in detail** on **particular aspects** of the text or language. 'Language' – vocabulary, **imagery**, variety of sentences, **dialogue**/speech, etc. 'Form' – how the story is told (e.g. first person **narrative**, letters, diaries, chapter by chapter?) 'Structure' – the order in which events are revealed, or in which characters appear, or descriptions are presented 'Create meaning' – what can we, as readers, infer from what the writer tells us? What is implied by particular descriptions, or events? 'Subject terminology' – words you should use when writing about novels, such as **character**, **protagonist**, **imagery**, **setting**, etc.	**Don't write:** *The writing is really descriptive in this bit so I get a good picture of Pemberley.* **Do write:** *Austen **conveys** the sense that Pemberley's **setting** impresses Elizabeth as she observes the 'hill, crowned with wood ...' which was 'a beautiful object'. The **metaphorical use** of 'crowned' **implies** its, and perhaps Darcy's, majesty.*

THE THREE 'I'S

- The best analysis focuses on specific ideas, events or uses of language and thinks about what is **implied.**
- This means looking beyond the obvious and beginning to draw **inferences.** On the surface, Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley tells us how lovely it is, and how rich Darcy must be, but what deeper ideas does it signify about her relationship to Darcy, or about the way settings are linked to character?
- From the inferences you make across the text as a whole, you can arrive at your own **interpretation** – a sense of the bigger picture, a wider evaluation of a person, relationship or idea.