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## ELIZABETH BENNET

### WHO IS ELIZABETH?

- Elizabeth is the second oldest of the Bennet sisters.
- She is Mr Bennet's favourite daughter and she is also very close to her sister Jane, her aunt Mrs Gardiner and her friend Charlotte Lucas.
- We frequently view events from her perspective.
- She is the novel's heroine in the sense that she is the main focus of the reader's interest, though she makes mistakes and is not particularly heroic.
- In the novel's concern with pride and with prejudice, she and Darcy are the main players. Their path to a better understanding of each other and ultimately falling in love is the novel's central plot.
- By the end of the novel she is Darcy's wife and the mistress of Pemberley.

### WIT AND HUMOUR

Elizabeth Bennet is intelligent and lively, and her 'quickness' (p. 7) of mind is made evident in her taste for witty and teasing conversation, where she likes to adopt striking and independent views. Evidence for this is best found in her conversations with Bingley, his sisters and Darcy when she is looking after Jane at Netherfield in Volume One, Chapters VIII, IX and XI (Chapters 8, 9 and 11).

She likes to laugh at people, including herself. We are told after Darcy refused to dance with her that 'She told the story with great spirit amongst her friends; for she had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in anything ridiculous' (p. 14). It is this quality of humour that attracts Darcy. Her rival Miss Bingley calls it 'that little something, bordering on conceit and impertinence' (p. 51), but the **narrator** has already told us that 'there was a mixture of sweetness and archness in her manner which made it difficult for her to affront anybody' (p. 51).

### IRONY

Elizabeth shares her capacity for **irony** with her father, and with the narrator. This allows her to stand away from situations and offer judgements on them, sometimes (though not as often as the narrator or her father) in the form of saying the opposite of what she really means. 'Mr Darcy is all politeness', she remarks in Volume One, Chapter VI (Chapter 6) (p. 27), as a way of avoiding dancing with him: we can guess that she is remembering his rudeness to her.

### STUDY FOCUS: REFLECTION AND REALISATION

As the novel progresses we start to share more of Elizabeth's thoughts and see her more inwardly, often by means of the technique called **free indirect discourse** or thought, where we are presented with thoughts in the manner of indirect speech. A key passage in reviewing Elizabeth's growth is Volume Two, Chapter XIII (Chapter 36), when we see her painfully coming to terms with her mistaken understanding of Wickham and Darcy while reading Darcy's letter: 'She grew absolutely ashamed of herself' (p. 201). She has to take in information that contradicts some of her prejudiced judgements, and in doing so realises that she has not been as sharp a reader of character as she has confidently supposed. She blames herself for not having recognised the smack of 'impropriety' (p. 200) in Wickham's behaviour, and allowing herself to be deceived by his charm.



#### GRADE BOOSTER A02

Compare and contrast the attitudes to marriage expressed by Elizabeth and other characters in *Pride and Prejudice*.

## KEY QUOTATIONS: ELIZABETH

A01

### Key quotation 1:

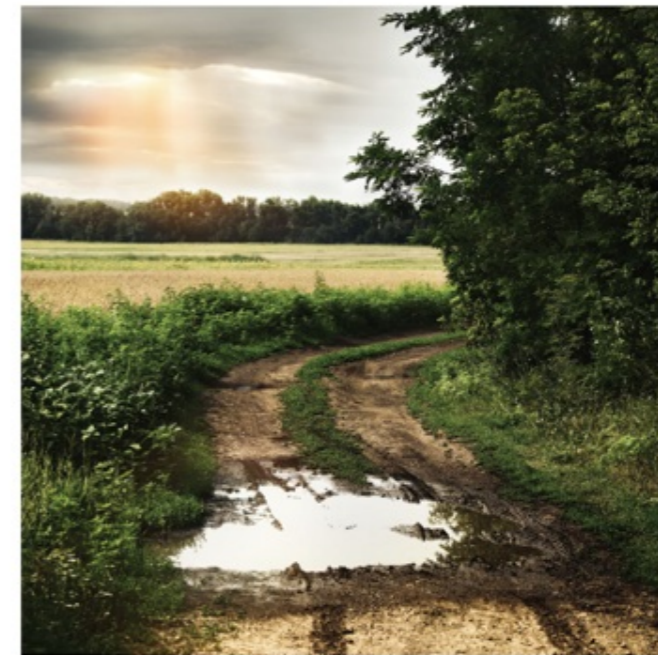
'Elizabeth continued her walk alone ... springing over puddles with impatient activity, and finding herself at last within view of the house, with weary ankles, dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise.' (p. 33)

- She is active and robust, to the point of being considered unfeminine by her enemies. Her dirty petticoat is shocking to Miss Bingley and a subject of ridicule.
- Darcy and Bingley, however, find the results of her vigour appealing and attractive.
- The haste with which Elizabeth walks to Netherfield and her lack of attention to her appearance also show us how concerned she is about her sister's welfare and her determination to see her.

### Key quotation 2:

'It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley.' (p. 353)

- Elizabeth is revealing to her sister Jane that she has fallen in love with Darcy and agreed to marry him.
- Is Elizabeth entirely joking when she remarks that she fell in love with Darcy when she saw Pemberley? Is one of the lessons that Elizabeth has to learn to place true value on Darcy's wealth and position, the very source of his pride?
- Earlier in the novel, Elizabeth feels with some indignation that Charlotte Lucas has sacrificed 'every better feeling to worldly advantage' (p. 123) by agreeing to marry Mr Collins but Elizabeth acknowledges here, however teasingly, that 'worldly advantage' has been gained by herself too, only with a more sympathetic husband.



#### CRITICAL VIEWPOINT A03

Only Darcy and Elizabeth develop as characters in *Pride and Prejudice*. Perhaps it is because of their superior intelligence that they are marked out by the narrator as capable of moral evolution in a way that their friends, neighbours and relatives are not. Or it may just be an aspect of novelistic convention to concentrate only on the 'juvenile leads', as they would be called in the theatre: the paired young **protagonist** and **antagonist** around whom the story revolves.

## HOW TO WRITE HIGH-QUALITY RESPONSES

The quality of your writing – how you express your ideas – is vital for getting a higher grade, and **AO1** and **AO2** are specifically about **how** you respond.

### FIVE KEY AREAS

The quality of your responses can be broken down into **five** key areas.

#### 1. THE STRUCTURE OF YOUR ANSWER/ESSAY

- First, get **straight to the point in your opening paragraph**. Use a sharp, direct first sentence that deals with a key aspect and then follows up with evidence or a detailed reference.
- **Put forward an argument or point of view** (you won't **always** be able to challenge or take issue with the essay question, but generally, where you can, you are more likely to write in an interesting way).
- **Signpost your ideas** with connectives and references, which help the essay flow.
- **Don't repeat points already made**, not even in the conclusion, unless you have something new to say that adds a further dimension.

#### EXAMINER'S TIP

Answer the question set, not the question you'd like to have been asked. Examiners say that often students will be set a question on one character (for example, Mrs Bennet) but end up writing almost as much about another (such as Elizabeth). Or, they write about one aspect from the question (for example, 'the lives of the upper classes') but ignore another (such as 'social mobility'). **Stick to the question**, and answer **all parts of it**.

#### TARGETING A HIGH GRADE

A01

Here's an example of an opening paragraph that gets straight to the point, addressing the question:

*'Pride and Prejudice is centrally concerned with personal happiness and the grounds on which it might be achieved.'* (Vivien Jones) **How do you respond to this viewpoint?**

*"Pride and Prejudice" is indeed concerned with the achievement of personal happiness but not at any cost. When Lydia writes to Elizabeth to wish her 'joy' and tell her that if she loves Darcy 'half as well as I do my dear Wickham, you must be very happy' (p. 365), the reader is reminded that happiness represents different things for different characters. For Charlotte Lucas, the security a marriage brings matters more than marital joy although Charlotte does appear to achieve a degree of contentment by marrying Mr Collins. But it is Elizabeth's marriage to Darcy – the novel's central narrative – that is portrayed most convincingly by Austen as combining personal attraction and compatibility of character, along with everything a good marriage represents in terms of financial security, social standing and inheritance.*

Immediate focus on task and key words with example from text

#### 2. USE OF TITLES, NAMES, ETC.

This is a simple, but important, tip to stay on the right side of the examiners.

- Make sure that you spell correctly the titles of the texts, chapters, name of authors and so on. Present them correctly, too, with double quotation marks and capitals as appropriate. For example, *'In Volume One, Chapter 1 (Chapter 1) of "Pride and Prejudice" ...'*.
- Use the **full title**, unless there is a good reason not to (e.g. it's very long).
- Use the terms 'novel' or 'text' rather than 'book' or 'story'. If you use the word 'story', the examiner may think you mean the plot/action rather than the 'text' as a whole.

### 3. EFFECTIVE QUOTATIONS

Do not 'bolt on' quotations to the points you make. You will get some marks for including them, but examiners will not find your writing very fluent.

The best quotations are:

- Relevant
- Not too long
- Integrated into your argument/sentence.

#### TARGETING A HIGH GRADE

A01

Here is an example of quotations successfully embedded in a sentence:

*Mr Collins believes that Elizabeth's refusal of him is due only to her 'true delicacy' (p. 105) and 'bashful modesty' (p. 108). This stereotypical view of femininity is at odds with the reader's view of Elizabeth as an intelligent and spirited character who is not afraid to speak her mind.*

Remember – quotations can also be a well-selected set of three or four single words or phrases embedded in a sentence to build a picture or explanation. Or they can be longer ones that are explored and picked apart.

#### 4. TECHNIQUES AND TERMINOLOGY

By all means mention literary terms, techniques, conventions or people (for example, 'omniscient narrator' or 'epistolary novel' or 'Mary Wollstonecraft') **but** make sure that you:

- Understand what they mean or who they are
- Are able to link them to what you're saying
- Spell them correctly.

#### 5. GENERAL WRITING SKILLS

Try to write in a way that sounds professional and uses standard English. This does not mean that your writing will lack personality – just that it will be authoritative.

- Avoid colloquial or everyday expressions such as 'got', 'alright', 'ok' and so on.
- Use terms such as 'convey', 'suggest', 'imply', 'infer' to explain the writer's methods.
- Refer to 'we' when discussing the audience/reader.
- Avoid assertions and generalisations; don't just state a general point of view ('Elizabeth refuses Mr Collins's proposal because he is boring'), but analyse closely, with clear evidence and textual detail.

#### TARGETING A HIGH GRADE

A01

Note the professional approach in this example:

*Austen's presentation of Mr Collins allows the reader to see that he is no match for Elizabeth and makes her refusal of him seem a foregone conclusion. Both Elizabeth and her father conjure up an accurate and amusing image of Mr Collins on the basis of his letter announcing his impending arrival: 'Can he be a sensible man, sir?' (p. 63). Meanwhile his attempts at 'gallantry' (p. 63) and 'solemnity' (p. 67) are, ironically, taken seriously by Mrs Bennet and Mary, whose judgement we are likely to question. Given Mr Collins's long-windedness, pomposity and obsequious praise for Lady Catherine, it is no surprise that Mr Bennet finds his guest 'absurd' (p. 67) nor that Mr Collins's proposal causes in Elizabeth feelings 'which were divided between distress and diversion' (p. 103). Occasional passages of authorial intervention, in which we learn more about Mr Collins's upbringing and education, do little to overturn our first impressions of the self-important clergyman.*

#### GRADE BOOSTER

A02

It is important to remember that *Pride and Prejudice* is a text created by Austen. Thinking about the voices Austen creates through language and plotting will alert you not only to her methods as an author, but also to her intentions, i.e. the effect she seeks to create.