

Questions for Conversation at Longbourn

Book clubs come to *Before Pride and Prejudice* from different directions. Some readers already know the Bennet family well through Jane Austen. Others are meeting them for the first time. And many of the questions raised by the Bennets - the joys and frustrations of family, marriage, parenthood, money, expectations, and the passage of time - belong to all of us.

Choose the questions that interest your group. There is certainly no need to discuss them all.

For those who have already had the pleasure of reading Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

How did this story affect the Austen you already knew? These questions invite you to look again at familiar characters and relationships after spending time with the Bennet family during the years before Jane Austen begins her story.

1. After spending more time with Mr. Bennet, do you see him any differently than you did before?
2. What about Mrs. Bennet? Did knowing more about her younger years help you understand the woman - and the "nerves" - we meet in *Pride and Prejudice*?
3. We meet Mr. and Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* after many years of marriage. What was it like to go back and see them meet, fall in love, marry, and begin their family?
4. You sometimes know what lies ahead for these characters when they do not. Did that make any particular moment in the story more poignant, heartfelt, or moving?
5. When you next read *Pride and Prejudice*, is there a character, scene, or relationship you think you may see differently because you have now spent these earlier years with the Bennet family?

For those who are reading *Before Pride and Prejudice* prior to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

What do you think will happen when you don't yet know Austen's answer? You have the unusual opportunity to meet the Bennets without knowing where Jane Austen will eventually take them. These questions are about your first impressions, your expectations, and what you imagine may lie ahead.

6. What did you think of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet when they first met? Could you understand what each saw in the other?
7. Their lives change considerably once courtship gives way to marriage and children. What surprised you most about the way their relationship changed?
8. By the time you reached the end of *Before Pride and Prejudice*, what did you imagine might lie ahead for Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty, and Lydia?
9. If you knew nothing about the Bennet family beyond what you learned in *Before Pride and Prejudice*, which character's future would you be most curious about? What would you hope might happen for that person?
10. Now that you have met the Bennet family before Jane Austen begins her story, are you curious to find out what happens to them in *Pride and Prejudice*? Why - or why not?

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For anyone, irrespective of when you first came to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

What did this family and its world mean to you? These questions belong to everyone. They invite us to think not only about the Bennets, but about families, relationships, choices, expectations, and the ways in which a family living more than two centuries ago may still seem surprisingly familiar.

11. Five girls grow up under the same roof and become five very different people. How much of that difference do you think came from who they were, and how much came from the family around them?
12. Humor is very much a part of the Bennet household. When did you think it brought the family closer together? Were there also times when humor allowed someone to avoid saying what really needed to be said?
13. Love matters to these characters, but so do money, property, inheritance, and social standing. Were there times when those practical concerns affected a decision more than you expected?
14. The Bennets lived in a time when property, inheritance, gender, and social expectations placed very real limits on the choices people could make. How have those cultural rules and pressures changed since then? In what ways do you think some of them are still with us?
15. As you came to know the Bennet family across the years, did you recognize anything that reminded you of your own family - perhaps a relationship, a personality, a family story, or simply the way families remember their past?

Bonus Question

For those who have raised more than one child, grew up with siblings, or witnessed families with multiple children:

Even when children grow up in much the same home, their personalities can be remarkably different. Did you find the differences among Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty, and Lydia resonate with your own experience or observation?