

Book Club Discussion Guide



Sense and Sensibility by Jane Austen, Page 1 (September 2014)

Sense and Sensibility

By Jane Austen

About the author:

Jane Austen was born on 16 December 1775 at Steventon near Basingstoke, the seventh child of the rector of the parish. She lived with her family at Steventon until they moved to Bath when her father retired in 1801. After his death in 1805, she moved around with her mother; in 1809, they settled in Chawton, near Alton, Hampshire. Here she remained, except for a few visits to London, until in May 1817 she moved to Winchester to be near her doctor. There she died on 18 July 1817.

As a girl Jane Austen wrote stories, including burlesques of popular romances. Her works were only published after much revision, four novels being published in her lifetime. These are *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* (1816). Two other novels, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, were published posthumously in 1818 with a biographical notice by her brother, Henry Austen, the first formal announcement of her authorship. *Persuasion* was written in a race against failing health in 1815-16. She also left two earlier compositions, a short epistolary novel, *Lady Susan*, and an unfinished novel, *The Watsons*. At the time of her death, she was working on a new novel, *Sanditon*, a fragmentary draft of which survives.

Source: *Penguin Classics*

(cn.penguinclassics.com/nf/Author/AuthorPage/0.,1000001489,00.html)

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About this book:

Marianne Dashwood wears her heart on her sleeve, and when she falls in love with the dashing but unsuitable John Willoughby she ignores her sister Elinor's warning that her impulsive behaviour leaves her open to gossip and innuendo. Meanwhile Elinor, always sensitive to social convention, is struggling to conceal her own romantic disappointment, even from those closest to her. Through their parallel experience of love - and its threatened loss - the sisters learn that sense must mix with sensibility if they are to find personal happiness in a society where status and money govern the rules of love.

Source: *Penguin Classics*

<http://cn.penguinclassics.com/nf/Book/BookDisplay/0,,9780141439662,00.html>

Discussion Questions:

1. Talk about the significance of Austen's title. What is the difference in meaning between the words "sense" and "sensibility" ... and which sister represents which word? Which word most represents your own approach to life and love? Which matters more...or are they both equally important in choosing a mate?
2. If you haven't already (in question 1), discuss the differences between the two sisters, Elinor and Marianne? Does Austen seem to favor one over the other?
3. Then, of course, there's Fanny Dashwood. How does she set about working on her husband after his father's death? Later, why does she make it clear that her brother Edward is not for Elinor? What does this suggest about the role of marriage for the upper classes?
4. Are Edward's attentions to Elinor fair and honorable? Why isn't he more open with her? Where does his honor lie - or where should it lie - with Lucy or Elinor? Do you admire

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him? Is he overly passive, honorable, loyal...or what?

5. What is Marianne's objection to Colonel Brandon? At times, do you find yourself sympathetic to Willoughby despite his abandonment of Marianne? Does Austen plant clues to Willoughby's character early on?
6. Talk about the other characters, as well: Sir John Middleton and his mother-in-law, Mrs. Jennings; John Dashwood; Mrs. Ferrars; and Lucy Steele. How does Austen portray them? What about Lucy, for instance, makes her seem insincere, even when we first meet her?
7. Austen explores the function of marriage in *Sense and Sensibility* (actually, in most if not all of her novels). What social constraints are placed on choosing a mate and for what reasons? Do similar restraints exist today?
8. What gave a woman advantages in the marriage market in Austen's time? What placed her at a disadvantage? Same for men: what made free choice in marriage difficult for them, as well?
9. In the end, does sense triumph over sensibility? Or do you think Austen is sympathetic to both perspectives? What does each sister come to learn from the other?
10. Do you find the ending satisfactory for both sisters? Do you feel the two make the right choice for happiness? Why or why not?

Source: *Lit Lovers*

litlovers.com/reading-guides/13-fiction/924-sense-and-sensibility-austen

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