

Centre for Excellence in Enquiry-Based Learning Resource Pack

Title: An Enquiry-Based Learning Course on Jane Austen

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Summary:

Problem scenarios and guidance for an enquiry-based course on Jane Austen.

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Final-year undergraduate

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Introduction

The following document applies, with variations, the structure of the courses on Samuel Johnson and Eighteenth-Century Poetry¹ to a course on the work of Jane Austen. This Jane Austen course was delivered at the University of Manchester in the year 2004-5.

There is less room in a course on a novelist for the range of scenarios provided for the earlier courses. For example, a 'Selection' would not be an appropriate task. This set of problems for Jane Austen was devised to meet the following challenges:

- The need to enable students who had not familiarised themselves with Jane Austen's novels before the beginning of the course to gain an immediate entry to the works. The introductory problem addresses this aim.
- The desire to balance the aim of allowing students to pursue their interests within the novels with the need to stretch students' reading and thinking. The range of options under Problem 2 is designed to do this, with the quotations from the novels being triggers to creative ideas: for example, the quotations under 'People' show that there is more to Jane Austen's characters than just the heroines.
- The aim of extending students' knowledge to encompass the range of Jane Austen's works. Problem 2 is designed to ensure that each group produces material from all the six published novels. The course ends with an examination in which candidates are required to demonstrate knowledge of at least two novels that they, as individuals, have not used in Problems 2 and 3.
- The aim of giving students the opportunity to engage critically with some aspects of literary theory. The subjects for debate (Problem 3) are chosen to encourage students to think on both sides of critical issues.

¹ See CEEBL Resource Pack 001 *Designing an Enquiry-Based Learning Course*

Jane Austen Problems

Problem 1 (Introductory); Outcome: oral (non-assessed)

Problem 2; Outcome: written

Problem 3; Outcome: oral

Problem 1 (Introductory)
Outcome: oral (non-assessed)

ADVERTISEMENT

To begin at the beginning

BBC Radio 4's 'Open Book' programme (broadcast at 4pm on Sundays and Thursdays) is running a competition to discover listeners' choice of the best opening chapter in English fiction. Programmes leading up to the vote will contain a slot in which a series of celebrity teams will each argue the merits of one opening chapter. You are invited to put the case for the opening chapter of any one Jane Austen novel.

You will have precisely ten minutes of broadcast time to put your case.

Note that material used in this problem may be re-used in any of the later assessed elements of the course

Problem 2

Outcome: written

The Jane Austen Society is planning to publish a series of short booklets. Each booklet will be written by a team and will examine the significance of a separate topic within Jane Austen's novels. Each booklet should provide material from all six of the published novels (*Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Persuasion*). Decisions concerning the balance between the novels and the inclusion of material from Jane Austen's other writings will be left to the teams' discretion. The topics for the series are listed below. Note that the quotations are intended merely as illustrations: they are not prescriptive of the content of the booklets.

You are invited to submit any one booklet for scrutiny by the editorial board. The length of the booklet will be 2500 words times the number of people in your team.

1. Past times

'Do you understand muslins, sir?'

'Particularly well; I always buy my own cravats, and am allowed to be an excellent judge; and my sister has often trusted me in the choice of a gown. I bought one for her the other day, and it was pronounced to be a prodigious bargain by every lady who saw it. I gave but five shillings a yard for it, and a true Indian muslin.'

(*Northanger Abbey*, volume 1, chapter 3)

'Remember me kindly to her. La! If you have not got your spotted muslin on! I wonder you was not afraid of its being torn.'

(*Sense and Sensibility*, volume 3, chapter 2)

She enquired into Charlotte's domestic concerns familiarly and minutely, and gave her a great deal of advice, as to the management of them all; told her how every thing ought to be regulated in so small a family as hers, and instructed her as to the care of her cows and her poultry.

(*Pride and Prejudice*, volume 2, chapter 6)

She was so little equal to Rebecca's puddings and Rebecca's hashes, brought to table as they all were, with such accompaniments of half-cleaned plates, and not half-cleaned knives and forks, that she was very often constrained to defer her heartiest meal, till she could send her brothers in the evening for biscuits and buns.

(*Mansfield Park*, volume 3, chapter 11)

'They will have their barouche-landau, of course, which holds four perfectly...'

(*Emma*, volume 2, chapter 14)

Her ladyship's carriage was a barouche, and did not hold more than four with any comfort.

(*Persuasion*, volume 2, chapter 7)

2. Places

He talked of foregrounds, distances and second distances - side-screens and perspectives - lights and shades; and Catherine was so hopeful a scholar, that when they gained the top of Beechen Cliff, she voluntarily rejected the whole city of Bath, as unworthy to make part of a landscape.

(*Northanger Abbey*, volume 1, chapter 14)

Cleveland was a spacious, modern-built house, situated on a sloping lawn. It had no park, but the pleasure grounds were tolerably extensive...

(*Sense and Sensibility*, volume 3, chapter 6)

They gradually ascended for half a mile, and then found themselves at the top of a considerable eminence, where the wood ceased, and the eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House, situated on the opposite side of a valley, into which the road with some abruptness wound.

(*Pride and Prejudice*, volume 3, chapter 1)

In a review of the two houses, as they appeared to her before the end of a week, Fanny was tempted to apply to them Dr Johnson's celebrated judgment as to matrimony and celibacy, and say, that though Mansfield Park might have some pains, Portsmouth could have no pleasures.

(*Mansfield Park*, volume 3, chapter 8)

The considerable slope, at nearly the foot of which the Abbey stood, gradually acquired a steeper form beyond its grounds; and at half a mile distant was a bank of considerable abruptness and grandeur, well clothed with wood...

(*Emma*, volume 3, chapter 6)

When Lady Russell, not long afterwards, was entering Bath on a wet afternoon, and driving through the long course of streets from the Old Bridge to Camden-place...

(*Persuasion*, volume 2, chapter 2)

3. People

Henry was not able to obey his father's injunction of remaining wholly at Northanger in attendance on the ladies, during his absence in London; the engagements of his curate at Woodston obliging him to leave them on Saturday for a couple of nights.

(*Northanger Abbey*, volume 1, chapter 13)

'Edward have got some business at Oxford, he says; so he must go there for a time; and after *that*, as soon as he can light upon a Bishop, he will be ordained. I wonder what curacy he will get!'

(*Sense and Sensibility*, volume 3, chapter 2)

A fortunate chance had recommended him to Lady Catherine de Bourgh when the living of Hunsford was vacant; and the respect which he felt for her high rank, and his veneration for her as his patroness, mingling with a very good opinion of himself, of his authority as a clergyman, and his rights as a rector, made him altogether a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self importance and humility.

(*Pride and Prejudice*, volume 1, chapter 15)

'My dear Edmund, if you were but in orders now, you might perform the ceremony directly. How unlucky that you are not ordained, Mr Rushworth and Maria are quire ready.'

(*Mansfield Park*, volume 1, chapter 9)

He had a comfortable home for her, and Emma imagined a very sufficient income; for though the vicarage of Highbury was not large, he was known to have some independent property...
(*Emma*, volume 1, chapter 4)

He was in orders, and having a curacy in the neighbourhood where residence was not required, lived at his father's house, only two miles from Uppercross.
(*Persuasion*, volume 1, chapter 9)

4. Events

They danced again; and, when the assembly closed, parted, on the lady's side at least, with a strong inclination for continuing the acquaintance.
(*Northanger Abbey*, volume 1, chapter 3)

'...tomorrow you must absolutely dine with us, for we shall be a large party.'
Mrs Jennings enforced the necessity. 'And who knows but you may raise a dance?' said she.
(*Sense and Sensibility*, volume 1, chapter 18)

When those dances were over she returned to Charlotte Lucas, and was in conversation with her, when she found herself suddenly addressed by Mr Darcy, who took her so much by surprise in his application for her hand, that, without knowing what she did, she accepted him.
(*Pride and Prejudice*, volume 1, chapter 18)

Mr Crawford was not far off; Sir Thomas brought him to her saying something which discovered to Fanny, that *she* was to lead the way and open the ball; an idea that had never occurred to her before.
(*Mansfield Park*, volume 2, chapter 10)

It may be possible to do without dancing entirely. Instances have been known of young people passing many, many months successively, without being at any ball of any description...
(*Emma*, volume 2, chapter 11)

Sir Walter, his two daughters, and Mrs Clay, were the earliest of all their party, at the rooms in the evening; and as Lady Dalrymple must be waited for, they took their station by one of the fires in the octagon room.
(*Persuasion*, volume 2, chapter 8)

5. The outside world

Charming as were all Mrs Radcliffe's works, and charming even as were the works of her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for. Of the Alps and Pyrenees, with their pine forests and their vices, they might give a faithful delineation; and Italy, Switzerland, and the South of France, might be as fruitful in horrors as they were represented.
(*Northanger Abbey*, volume 2, chapter 10)

'And books! - Thomson, Cowper, Scott -she would buy them all over and over again...'
(*Sense and Sensibility*, volume 1, chapter 17)

Sir William Lucas had been formerly in trade in Meryton, where he had made a tolerable fortune and risen to the honour of knighthood by an address to the King, during his mayorality.
(*Pride and Prejudice*, volume 1, chapter 5)

She took the letters as he gave them. The first was from the Admiral to inform his nephew, in a few words, of his having succeeded in the object he had undertaken, the promotion of young Price...the circumstance of Mr William Price's commission as second lieutenant of H. M. sloop Thrush, being made out, was spreading general joy through a wide circle of great people.
(*Mansfield Park*, volume 2, chapter 13)

...this pianoforte had arrived from Broadwood's the day before, to the great astonishment of both aunt and niece...
(*Emma*, volume 2, chapter 8)

'He is rear admiral of the white. He was in the Trafalgar action, and has been in the East Indies since...'
(*Persuasion*, volume 1, chapter 3)

6. Comedy

Her greedy eye glanced rapidly over a page. She started at its import. Could it be possible, or did not her senses play her false? An inventory of linen, in coarse and modern characters, seemed all that was before her!
(*Northanger Abbey*, volume 2, chapter 7)

Marianne would have thought herself very inexcusable had she been able to sleep at all the first night after parting from Willoughby.
(*Sense and Sensibility*, volume 1, chapter 16)

'An unhappy alternative is before you, Elizabeth. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents. Your mother will never see you again if you do *not* marry Mr Collins, and I will never see you again if you *do*.'
(*Pride and Prejudice*, volume 1, chapter 20)

'Prayers were always read in it by the domestic chaplain, within the memory of many. But the late Mr Rushworth left it off.'
'Every generation has its improvements', said Miss Crawford, with a smile, to Edmund.
(*Mansfield Park*, volume 1, chapter 9)

'Ah! Ma'am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me - but you will be limited as to number - only three at once.'
(*Emma*, volume 3, chapter 7)

Sir Walter Elliott, of Kellynch Hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage...
(*Persuasion*, volume 1, chapter 1)

Problem 3

Outcome: oral

Debate

The Jane Austen Society is running a series of debates to take place in its regional centres. You are invited to organise and supply the teams for one of these debates, to be held as the inaugural event of the newly-formed North-West Branch of the Society.

The conventional structure for such a debate is:

- First speaker for the motion
- First speaker against the motion
- Second speaker for the motion
- Second speaker against the motion
- Questions from the floor
- Summing-up against the motion
- Summing up for the motion

There is normally a chair, who introduces the debate and the speakers, organises the questions from the floor and the vote, and concludes the debate.

This pattern may be adjusted as appropriate to fit the number of participants in the debate. Each debate should last between 30 and 40 minutes.

Proposed motions for debates are given below. You are, however, free to propose your own motions. Debates may focus on a single example of Jane Austen's *oeuvre* or range across two or more works, at the discretion of the participants.

1. 'Feminist criticism has devalued Jane Austen's novels by limiting them to a single issue.'
2. 'Screen versions of Jane Austen's novels are always a crude and inferior version of the original novels.'
3. 'Jane Austen's novels can only be properly understood when located in the historical time of their production.'
4. 'The more we know about Jane Austen's life, the better we understand her work.'
5. 'Charlotte Bronte and D.H. Lawrence were right: Jane Austen's novels lack passion.'