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Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Sense and Sensibility

by Jane Austen

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Sense and Sensibility

Note to the Teacher

Jane Austen was born in 1775 in Steventon, Hampshire, England, as the seventh child (and second daughter) of Rev. George Austen and his wife. Jane was sent to boarding school twice when she was quite young, but she received most of her education at home.

All of the family members were voracious readers and made good use of their library, which boasted over 500 books. Jane did enjoy a few flirtations as a young girl and was once engaged, but never married. When her father died, she needed money and decided to try to publish the little stories she had written for her family. When *Sense and Sensibility* was accepted by a publisher in 1811, making a profit of 140 pounds, Jane was encouraged and began revising her earlier pieces. Once *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* were accepted, she wrote very quickly and produced three more novels in the next three years. She became ill during this time and died in 1817 at the age of 41. Her body is buried in Winchester Cathedral in London. Her remaining two novels were prepared for publication by her brother Henry, and both were published posthumously.

Jane Austen's writing marks the transition from eighteenth century writing based on reason and judgment to the Romantic Age, in which writing emphasized emotion and creativity. It was a time of great literary energy, with the number of readers increasing and the types of writing becoming more and more diverse. Historically, England was still reeling from the revolution in her colonies, her reaction to the French Revolution, which resulted in harsher laws at home, and war with France ending in the Battle of Waterloo. The Industrial Revolution swept through England around this time, shifting England's mode of manufacturing from one dependent primarily on hand labor to one dependent on machine power. The Industrial Revolution produced far-reaching economic and social changes within England. On the literary front, poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley were popular. The familiar essay and the novel each went through significant developments, and it is during this period that Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*. Perhaps the two best-known novelists of this period, however, are Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen.

Note: All references come from the Dover Thrift edition of *Sense and Sensibility*, copyright 1996.

Sense and Sensibility

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. discuss the author's writing style, including use of satire, irony, and character foils.
2. cite examples of verbal irony and explain why they are ironic.
3. identify the main theme of the novel and show how Austen develops this theme.
4. cite several examples of a typical eighteenth century English lifestyle as described in this novel.
5. discuss the importance of letters in this novel and explain how they contribute to the development of the plot.
6. compare the major relationships on the basis of love, communication, and amount of sense or sensibility in each.
7. discuss the importance of the visits that take place during the course of the novel, showing their contribution to the plot.
8. list several characters who might be considered either dynamic or static characters and explain why they would be labeled that way.
9. trace the development of the major male characters (Edward Ferrars, Colonel Brandon, and Willoughby) pointing out the virtue or lack of virtue that helps them to a happy ending or an unhappy ending.
10. define "comic relief" and explain how it is used in the novel.
11. explain the way inheritance laws worked during this time in England and how this affects the Dashwood family, giving the novel its underlying purpose.
12. compare and contrast Elinor and Marianne Dashwood using examples from the text.
13. choose three or four of the mother characters and use examples from the novel to compare their mothering skills.
14. discuss several of the actions between men and women in the novel and be able to pick out which were considered proper and which were not, with regard to the morals and etiquette of the time.

Sense and Sensibility

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Describe both Elinor and Marianne and show how each grows and changes through the course of the novel. Are they static or dynamic?
2. Why do the Dashwood women leave Norland and go far away to live at Barton cottage?
3. Describe their brother, Mr. John Dashwood, and his wife Fanny with respect to how they deal with the promise John makes on his father's deathbed.
4. Name several of the minor characters that the Dashwood women become surrounded by through the novel. Choose three and show how each is important to advancing the plot and revealing the sisters' personalities.
5. How does Marianne meet Willoughby? Trace the development of their romance.
6. How does Elinor meet Edward Ferrars? Trace the development of their romance.
7. People in that era of England visited each other far more often than we visit each other today. Choose two of the most important visits in the novel, describe each briefly, and explain why they are important to the plot.
8. Why do you think Austen lets her readers see that Edward wears a ring with a strand of hair in it?
9. Cutting locks of hair is important to two other characters, as well. Who are they and why is it important to them?
10. Why is Marianne so upset after Willoughby's visit? How does she act after he leaves? How long does she act this way?
11. Describe Colonel Brandon's personality and actions when the Dashwood sisters first meet him.
12. What is the secret in Brandon's past that involves Eliza and Ms. Williams? How do we first learn of this secret? Who tells us the full story and why?
13. Lucy Steele is another person who has a secret. What is her secret and whom does she tell?
14. In contrast to Marianne's behavior, how does Elinor react to the news that hope of marrying Edward is gone?

Sense and Sensibility

Volume One

Chapter 1

VOCABULARY

moiety – a portion or share
sanguine – cheerfully confident
propriety – appropriateness
amiable – good-natured and likable
imprudence – an unwise or indiscreet act

1. This novel revolves around the Dashwood family. Who is Henry Dashwood?

2. When Henry Dashwood dies, how is his money divided among his four children?

3. Describe Mr. John Dashwood.

4. What did John promise his dying father he would do with regard to his stepmother and stepsisters?

Chapter 9

VOCABULARY

chagrined – embarrassed
gallantry – polite attention to women
incommoded – inconvenienced

1. A very important new character is introduced in this chapter. How do the Dashwoods meet Willoughby?

2. Describe Willoughby.

Chapter 10

VOCABULARY

decorum – appropriateness of behavior
censure – express a judgment
protégé – one whose training is promoted by an influential person
nabobs – persons of wealth
palanquins – a covered bed carried on four poles

1. Willoughby comes to the cottage every day after he rescues Marianne. Explain why.

3. By the end of the chapter what evidence is given of Marianne’s anxiety and restlessness?

Chapter 5

1. How do the girls know that Willoughby is actually in town?

2. What is the main topic discussed during Colonel Brandon’s visit?

3. What is Elinor’s response to Colonel Brandon’s statement?

Chapter 6

VOCABULARY

indisposition – slight illness
hartshorn – smelling salts

1. What happens at the party to visibly upset Marianne?
