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Teachers' Notes

Author / Work: Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*
Theme: Social Judgement

Rationale
Jane Austen is renowned for her close observation of behaviour and ability to depict more than just superficial points of view. She acknowledged the importance of class and position in her society, yet managed to convey her belief in moral integrity - despite the knowledge that most people were, and still are, impressed by wealth and reputation.

By studying these resources, students will be able to more ably appreciate the complexity of her craft in representing the different strata or classes of early 19th century society and to consider the judgements that were passed, rightly or wrongly, during these times. The specifics may shift but being accepted as a member of society is still important today.

Sir Walter Scott shares his view of Austen’s work as being unique at the time, in breaking away from the Gothic or melodramatic novel style common at the time, to produce a more realistic and recognisable portrayal of middle class life in the 1800s.

Content

Literary and historical sources:
- Review of *Emma* in the Quarterly Review (1815)
- Letter from Jane Austen to her sister Cassandra (1811)
- *An Analysis of Country Dancing* by Thomas Wilson (1811)
- Manuscript of chapters 10 and 11 from Jane Austen’s *Persuasion* (1816)
- Engraving from *The English Spy* (1825)
- Opinions of *Mansfield Park* and *Emma* by various people, transcribed by Jane Austen (after 1813)

Recommended reading (short articles):
*Pride and Prejudice and Social Judgement* by Professor Kathryn Sutherland

Documentary films:
A selection of short documentary-style films (approx. 10 minutes each):
www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/videos

External links:
http://www.janeausten.ac.uk/manuscripts/blpers/1.html
http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/timeline/index.html
Key questions

- In what ways do the social judgements evidenced in Austen’s novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, seem similar or different from those you recognise today?
- How clearly does Austen draw on her own experiences of social divisions to educate her readers?
- What level of importance did Austen appear to give to the feedback she received about her work?

Activities

1) Show students the *Painting of a Ball* portraying a group of society gentlemen and ladies. Ask the group to consider in what ways the people display a manner or sense of pride about their appearance, their presence or their social position. Is this inclusive or exclusive representation?

2) (i) Display this quote from Chapter 5 of *Pride and Prejudice* - Sir William thus began:

> ‘What a charming amusement for young people this is, Mr. Darcy! There is nothing like dancing after all. I consider it as one of the first refinements of polished society.’

> ‘Certainly, sir; and it has the advantage also of being in vogue amongst the less polished societies of the world. Every savage can dance.’  Chapter 5

(ii) Share with students the extracts from *An Analysis of Country Dancing* (page xv and xvii). Ask students to consider the social judgements established by each piece of writing, along with the purpose and intended audience and compare with current attitudes to dancing. Topics could include the decline and rise of social dancing, for example *Strictly Come Dancing*, footballers’ training, costs of dancing, the ‘first dance’ at weddings and so on.

3) Depending on the group composition and dynamic, ask students to attempt to follow the instructions on the succeeding pages of *An Analysis of Country Dancing*.

4) Facilitate student access to copies of the manuscript from Chapter 10 of *Persuasion* (for example using tablets). Encourage the class to enlarge the text as much as possible so that they can detect any of the deleted choices and make as much sense of the script as possible. They could type up their conclusions and compare with others – or this may happen naturally during the course of the lesson.

5) A transcript of the opening of Chapter 10 from *Persuasion* can be found here: [http://www.janeausten.ac.uk/manuscripts/blpers/1.html](http://www.janeausten.ac.uk/manuscripts/blpers/1.html). It shows the detail of changes made by Austen. Ask students to compare the style of writing with the opening of a chapter from *Pride and Prejudice*, for example Chapter 10. Can they distinguish any common features of Austen’s style?

6) Share the *Opinions* on Austen’s works and the *Letter from Austen to her sister Cassandra*.

   a. Divide the class into small groups and assign one or two novels to each one. Ask students to scrutinise the range of opinions expressed and the feedback to the whole class.

   b. Despite the high esteem in which Austen is held today, she had to pay to publish some novels herself (for example *Sense and Sensibility*) and did not
achieve fame or fortune during her lifetime. Ask students to discuss the social and moral judgements that could have influenced Austen’s reception at the time she was writing.

Extension activities

- Investigate the British Library’s Language and Literature Timeline. Under ‘Active timeline’, choose ‘Central timeline’ and under ‘Comparison timeline’ choose ‘Literary Works’. Scroll across to the late 18th century to see what was happening shortly before, during and just after Jane Austen was writing to supplement contextual knowledge of this period of literature.

- Ask students to write their own opinion of one or all of the following, in the form of the game Consequences, for example write their contribution, fold over paper to conceal their response and then pass it on:
  - Mr Bennett compared with Mr Bingley
  - Jane Bennett compared with Lydia Bennett
  - The benefits of marriage versus living together
  - Austen’s attitude to wealth, poverty, pride and prejudice