

Background Information

1 Read the text and answer the questions.

- 1 Which of the Bennet daughters are main characters?
- 2 Why is it important for the Bennet daughters to marry well?
- 3 How is Mr. Bingley important for Mrs. Bennet?
- 4 What kind of novel is *Pride and Prejudice*, on the most basic level?
- 5 What criticism does Jane Austen give of her society in the novel?



Pride and Prejudice is about the Bennet family. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet have five daughters. Jane is the oldest, and she is beautiful, kind, and good. Elizabeth is the next oldest. She, too, is pretty, but not as beautiful as Jane. She's free-spirited, outspoken, and intelligent. She's also the main character. The other three daughters are not as important to the story. They are Mary, the foolish intellectual, and Lydia and Kitty, the silly flirts. Because of the laws and customs in England at the time, none of these daughters will inherit the family home when Mr. Bennet passes away. In addition, Mr. Bennet is not a wealthy man.



Therefore, his daughters will be left with nothing when he is gone. For this reason, both Mr. and Mrs. Bennet are very concerned with finding

husbands for their daughters. Marriage is the only means by which the Bennet girls can avoid becoming destitute. At the beginning of the book, a new man named Mr. Bingley moves to town. He is rich, so Mrs. Bennet immediately wants to introduce him to her daughters. The ball described in the following passage is the first chance the Bennet women have to meet Mr. Bingley and their impressions of him and his friend Mr. Darcy are given.

On the surface, *Pride and Prejudice* is a romance, where Elizabeth and Mr Darcy slowly move from dislike of one another to falling in love. However, under the surface is Jane Austen's keen and often biting humor, as she lays open the hypocrisy and materialism of her society, where every woman by necessity must find a man – and one with means. On each level – as a romance, a comedy of manners, and a social critique – the novel works exquisitely well, earning it a place alongside the other classics of English literature.