Jane Austen

- Born December 16, 1775
- 7th of 8 children, 6 boys and 2 girls
- Father was a country clergyman, rector of Steventon
- Went to boarding school with sister Cassandra and returned at age 9
- In 1801 moved with family to Bath
- In 1809 moved to Chawton and resumed writing
- Died on July 18, 1817
18th century England

- Importance of the small community
- the great house
- landed gentlemen
- network of personal contacts
- system of manners
- formal social rituals
Contemporary events of Austen

- Napoleonic Wars
- Slave trade
- rise of industrialism and “moneyed middle class” (Industrial Revolution)
- agricultural changes
Connections between families were created by meetings between the land owners during county activities.

Rank was important in understanding the network of face to face contacts which embraced all of society.

A hierarchy was established with gentry at the top and servants at the bottom.
The family unit acts as a regulative force within a society that might otherwise become unstable. Connected with the marriage is the entire ritual of courtship and marriage.
18th century means to maintain conventional society

- The family imposes the rituals as a means of retaining control over the girl or man until the marriage, and then the cycle begins again.
Equation between the polite behavior of the individual and the moral health of the nation is necessary for an understanding of Austen’s novels.
Austen believed that the fate of the landed classes depended on their ability to preserve the system of manners which supported their authority.
Purpose of Manners

- The fact is that it is largely through manners that Austen works out the questions of morality and social power.
Austen’s major theme

- The fate of society depends upon the ability of the landed gentry to live up to their ideal of concern for others and the willingness of other groups to accept this concern.
Literature was a means to instruct by example so that individuals might emulate the good. Rarely are characters completely good or evil.
Austen’s “Anti-Hero”

- Austen may have begun the trend toward the modern “anti-hero” in that her heroes and heroines are fallible with faults and foibles.
Austen felt that contemporary authors demanded emotional responses far in excess of what their fiction required and that they distorted human behavior to fit literary conventions.
Austen’s aim

- Rather than demanding tears of horror from her readers she elicited laughter; rather than drawing sentimental characters seriously she tried to purge all nonsense through wit, and rather than make her readers suffer through a series of false events, she tried to entertain them through a set of realistic conventions.
Comedy of Manners

- It deals with the relations and intrigues of gentlemen and ladies living in a polished and sophisticated society.
- It evokes laughter mainly at the violations of social convention and decorum.
- It relies for its effect in great part on the wit and sparkle of dialogue.
Major concerns

- Emphasis on breeding and upon attitudes toward life, not upon birth or fortune
- Uses wit and irony to provide stability because they regulate conduct (shows reader how to behave by illustrating a vulgar contrast)
- Concept of the gentleman as defined by the age
Major concerns (cont)

- Personal gentility is what keeps society functional
- Marriage is a rite of passage into adulthood for women
- Gentility, civility and breeding are the keys to Austen’s world
- Cosmic order in courtship and marriage
Themes

- courtship and marriage
  - Darcy and Elizabeth
  - Lydia and Wickham
  - Bingley and Jane
  - Charlotte and Mr. Collins

- Unexpected delays or issues
Characters of Pride and Prejudice

REMEMBER that you are responsible for updating the character log in your notebook during this unit!
Elizabeth Bennett

- Intelligent
- Lively and animated
- Opinionated and staunch
- Demonstrates an acceptable revolt against conventions of society

- Called “the most delightful a creature that ever appeared in print
- Sets the action in the novel
- Personifies the prejudice in the title of the novel
Mr. Bennett

- Shrewd, witty, and learned and detached
- Regrets his marriage to an intellectual and social inferior
- Holds his wife up to subtle ridicule
- Fails his station in terms of the 18th century
- Fails to provide a male heir or provision for his daughters
- Fails to govern his family
- Allows others to assume his responsibilities and duties
Mrs. Bennett

- Comic creation
- suffers from “nerves”
- refuses to accept her role as wife or competent mother
- unintelligent, generally concerned with superficial matters

- Loud, overbearing and obnoxious
- lacks any “gentility”
- questing to get her five daughters married-- to anyone
- materialistic
George Wickham

- Villain of the novel
- points out the problems of raising expectations
- carries the theme of appearance vs reality-- he has all the appearance of goodness
- Must marry for money to maintain his lifestyle
- acts as a foil to Darcy
- acts as a moral lesson to Elizabeth
Child of nature
animal-like in appetites and desires
similar to her mother
mother’s favorite
selfish

Demands instant gratification
behavior indicates that she cares very little for societal conventions
vain
Darcy

- Arrogant about his position in society
- Tied to conventional wisdom about marriage partnerships
- Claims to be shy
- Opinionated

- Capable of growing and adjusting his value system
- Follows the noblesse oblige code
- Underestimated by Elizabeth
Charlotte Lucas

- Elizabeth’s best friend, discounting Jane
- older, unmarried
- practical according to society’s standards
- believes that any couple can be happy enough

- Doesn’t want to know potential spouse well
- marries for economic security and position
- gains Elizabeth’s disapproval for her choice
Mr. Collins

- Comic character
- pompous and officious
- position is due to avowdsons--awards of the church financed by rich people
- sycophantic

- Regards the upper classes with too much awe and lowers his own worth
- parody of the extremes of “gentility and manners”
Lady Catherine de Bourgh

- As ill bred and rude as Mrs. Bennett
deserves no special recognition based on her own abilities
enjoys dictating to others

- Continues the play on the word, “accomplishment”
emphasizes that gentility and good breeding are not solely based on wealth and privilege
Mr. and Mrs. Gardner

- Point out that gentility is not necessarily apportioned to the upper classes
- Exhibit easy and admirable manners and decorum
- Act as the parents that Elizabeth should have had
- Appear to “validate” the new observations of Elizabeth
Jane Bennett

- Naïve and gullible
- insists on believing the best about everyone
- is 18th century epitome of beauty and femininity
- reserved and conventional in her manner

- Slightly insipid
- lacks animation