



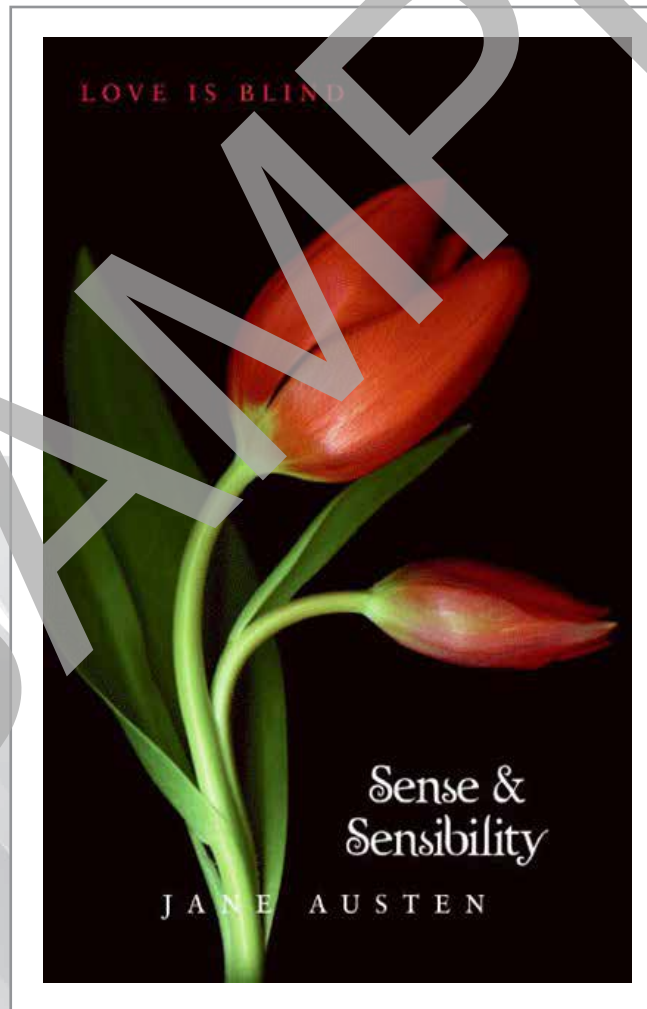
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Sense and Sensibility

Jane Austen



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Sense and Sensibility

Jane Austen

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Table of Contents

Summary	3
About the Author	3
Initiating Activities.....	4
Vocabulary Activities.....	7
Discussion Questions, Vocabulary, Writing Ideas, Activities	
Chapters 1-9	9
Chapters 10-17	11
Chapters 18-23	13
Chapters 24-29	16
Chapters 30-34	18
Chapters 35-39	20
Chapters 40-44	22
Chapters 45-50	24
Post-reading Discussion Questions	27
Post-reading Extension Activities	28

Summary

Jane Austen's first published work, *Sense and Sensibility*, is a witty portrayal of provincial society—with a focus on romantic relations—in late 18th-century England. Two sisters—one the epitome of “sensibility” (vitality, enthusiasm) and the other, a model of “sense” (prudence, discretion)—fall in love with two young gentlemen, and both romances lead to heartache. Austen penned this novel almost 200 years ago, but young readers today will find a lot that is familiar in the fairy-tale plot and the elements that drive it: the flirtations, secrets, romantic rivalries, collapsing relationships, and above all the difficulties men and women often encounter in communication with each other.

About the Author

Jane Austen was born in 1775 in Steventon, England, the seventh of eight children. Her father was a clergyman; both parents came from a long line of prosperous country families (headed by professionals, mainly clergymen). She led what many would consider a quiet, uneventful life, but her family was lively and intelligent—and it was that family and the neighbors around them who provided the subject matter for her work. At a time when novel-reading was still considered suspect by many, the Austens were avid novel-readers. They enjoyed amateur theatricals and provided an enthusiastic audience for the comic pieces Jane turned out as a girl. (Although she had practically no formal schooling, by age 14, Jane had written several comical parodies of contemporary literature such as Goldsmith's *History of Literature*.)

As a young adult, Jane was a prolific writer; by age 23 she had written three novels. There was a lull in her productivity between about 1800 and 1810. During that time she and her only sister, Cassandra (a lifelong intimate who, like Jane, never married) moved to Bath with their parents due to their father's failing health. After the father died in 1805, the family moved to Southampton and back to the country near Jane's childhood home in 1809.

There she wrote anonymously (“by a Lady”) for the last eight years of her life, turning out six novels which have been highly praised for their craftsmanship and wit. When she wrote *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), Jane Austen promised her publisher she would cover any losses, but the book earned a profit of 140 pounds. This, her first published novel, was followed by *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816), *Persuasion* (1818), and *Northanger Abbey* (1818). After being watched over by her family during a long illness, Jane was taken to Winchester for medical treatment and died there in 1817.

Discussion Questions • Vocabulary

Writing Ideas • Activities

Chapters 1-9, pp. 1-39

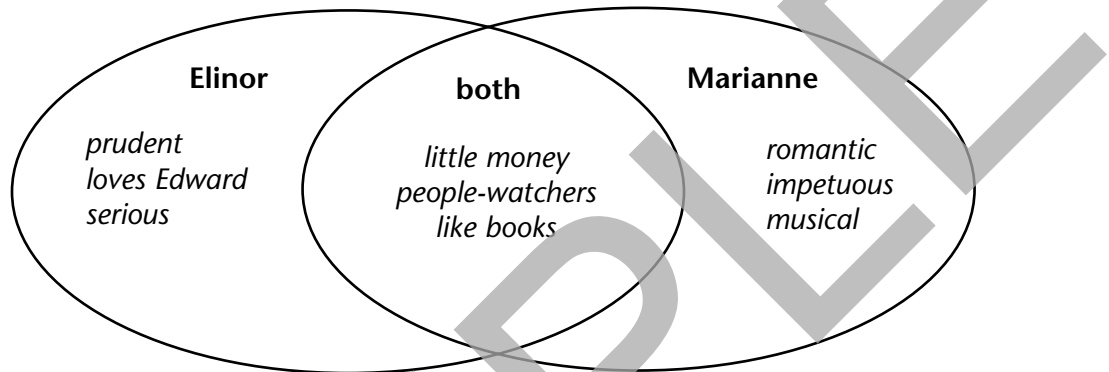
On his deathbed at Norland, Mr. Henry Dashwood is assured by his son, John, (product of his first marriage) that his second wife and three daughters (Elinor, Marianne, and Margaret) will be made comfortable. By law, all of the inheritance will go to John Dashwood and none to John's stepmother and stepsisters. After the funeral, however, the selfish Mrs. John Dashwood (Fanny) convinces her husband that his sisters and their mother can live well on the interest from the money they already have. She promptly installs herself at Norland with her husband and son. Mrs. Henry Dashwood and her girls stay on for a few months while looking for another place to live, and during that time, an attachment grows between the eldest daughter, prudent Elinor, and Fanny's brother, the gentlemanly Edward Ferrars. When kindly Mrs. Henry Dashwood's cousin, Sir John Middleton, sends a letter inviting mother and daughters to stay at a cottage near his home in Barton Park, they accept. At Barton, they meet Sir John, a jovial sportsman, Lady Middleton, a rather cold woman who lets her rowdy children run wild, Mrs. Jennings, Lady Middleton's loud but good-humored mother, and Colonel Brandon, a somber friend of Sir John's. One day while young Margaret and impetuous Marianne are out on a walk, they begin running to avoid the rain and Marianne hurts her ankle. A handsome stranger named Willoughby happens to be passing by and carries her in his arms to Barton Cottage.

Vocabulary

succession 1	moiety 2	bequest 2	sanguine 2
legacies 2	prudently 3	caricature 3	repent 3
entreaty 4	breach 4	effectual 4	moderation 4
sensibility 4	forbearance 5	imbibed 5	degraded 5
civility 5	alloy 5	stipulate 6	prodigious 7
annuity 7	superannuated 8	indecorous 10	melancholy 10
indefatigable 11	affluence 11	liberality 11	diffident 12
barouche 12	militated 13	connoisseur 14	composure 14
innate 15	propensities 15	conjectured 17	felicity 18
dejection 18	affronting 18	insinuations 18	impracticable 21
discretion 21	diminution 22	tedious 23	demesne 23
compact 23	garrets 23	approbation 24	pianoforte 25
countenance 25	solicitude 25	compass 27	piqued 27
insatiable 28	procured 28	vulgar 29	raillery 29
insipidity 29	repulsive 29	estimable 30	jointure 30
zealously 30	discernment 31	impertinence 31	infirmity 31
grate 33	languid 33	downs 35	animating 35
chagrined 35	exigence 35	incommoded 38	odious 39

Discussion Questions

1. Did these opening chapters raise any questions in your mind? For instance, did you wonder why Mr. Dashwood trusts his son to take care of Mrs. Dashwood and the girls? Did it surprise you that it takes Mrs. Dashwood so long to realize that John's promises are empty ones?
2. What are your impressions of Elinor and Marianne? How are they similar? How are they different? Which is more like her mother? Which one are you more like?



3. Why do Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters remain at Norland for several months after Fanny and John have moved in? (*The Dashwoods have nowhere else to go; there is a growing attachment between Edward and Elinor.*) Would you have gotten out sooner?
4. What does Mrs. Dashwood think of the attraction between Elinor and Edward Ferrars? (*She approves, since Edward seems nice and they love each other.*) What does this show you about the kind of mother Mrs. Dashwood is? (*Money matters to her, but not as much as her daughter's happiness.*) What are Marianne's feelings about the romance? (*She doesn't think Edward has enough taste, spirit, and intelligence.*) What does this show you about her "taste in men"? (*She is a romantic, likes handsome, charismatic, literate men.*)
5. Who is Sir John Middleton? (*Mrs. Henry Dashwood's cousin*) Why does he offer the cottage? (*out of generosity*) How does Mrs. Dashwood feel about accepting? (*relieved by the offer; anxious to accept*) Why doesn't Elinor try to dissuade her mother? (*She feels she has no right to object; the rent is low and this is a sensible move.*) Would you object?
6. How do you picture Sir John Middleton, his wife, and their children? (*Sir John is a boisterous sportsman; his wife is a rather insipid woman who lets their children run wild.*) Is this a household you would enjoy visiting?
7. How does Marianne hurt her ankle? (*While out walking, she and Margaret are caught in the rain; she falls while hurrying toward home.*) Who "rescues" her? (*Handsome Willoughby has been hunting and happens to pass by; he carries her to the house.*) Is this scene realistic? Does this remind you of any scenes from other stories or movies you know?

-
8. How can you tell that Colonel Brandon is interested in Marianne? (*He listens attentively to her music; Sir John says he is "smitten."*) What objections does she have to him? (*She thinks he is too old.*) Who seems to be in favor of such a match? (*Sir John, Mrs. Jennings, perhaps Elinor*) Why? (*He is single, seems gentlemanly and kind, is well-off financially.*) Are you surprised that the age difference doesn't seem to bother Marianne's mother?
 9. How does Marianne try to find out more about Willoughby? (*She asks Sir John.*) What sort of information does she want? (*She wants to know about his manners, pursuits, talents, reputation.*) What qualities do you think she is looking for? What questions would you ask to find out if someone you had just met was compatible with you?
 10. **Prediction Question:** What matches do you think will be made before the story is over?

Supplementary Activities

Literary Analysis: Irony

Explain that **irony** is a figure of speech in which the narrator's words really mean the opposite of what they seem to say. Point out the example in the last paragraph of Chapter 2. Elicit from students that the narrator is really saying that Fanny has persuaded her husband to renege on his promise to his dying father. The acts she proposes are not "neighborly" but stem from greed. The widow and children DO need money.

Writing Idea

On page 19, Mrs. Dashwood writes a letter to Sir Middleton with her acknowledgment of his kindness. Write the letter.

Chapters 10-17, pages 39-82

The older Colonel Brandon is partial to Marianne, but she is smitten with Willoughby. Edward is nowhere to be seen. Willoughby takes a lock of Marianne's hair and all assume that they will wed. Willoughby gives Marianne a horse, and Elinor considers it imprudent of her sister to accept. Plans for an excursion are abandoned when Colonel Brandon receives an upsetting letter and quickly leaves for town. Just when a match between Willoughby and Marianne seems assured, Willoughby announces that he must leave for London and does not know when he will return. As the days pass with no news from him, Marianne grows upset. Edward finally shows up, but he seems unaccountably strained.

Vocabulary

cant 39	picturesque 41	decorum 41	irksome 41
censure 41	speculative 42	annexed 42	patronized 43
protégé 43	nabobs 44	mohrs 44	palanquins 44
candour 44	insipid 44	artful 44	curricule 44
execution 45	illaudable 45	discourse 46	intimacy 47
amiable 48	prejudices 48	atone 48	inconstancy 48
minutiae 48	imprudence 49	indulgent 50	sagacity 52
commendation 59	prescience 63	cavil 67	inadvertence 68
concession 70	repose 71	indulgence 72	downs 74
fortnight 74	extorting 77	orator 78	grandeur 78
extravagant 79	maxim 80	subservient 81	gentility 81
reserved 82	gravity 82		

Discussion Questions

1. What are your impressions of Colonel Brandon? (*sombre, polite, considerate*) What would you like to ask him? What does he see in Marianne? Do you think he should give up on her?
2. What do you think of Willoughby? (*dashing, witty, charming*) What signals has he been sending Marianne? Does he remind you of other characters you have met in literature or film? (*example: Rhett Butler*)
3. What does Elinor think of Willoughby's present—the horse? (*She thinks her sister should not accept such a big present.*) Do you agree with her? Have you ever been a gift recipient in a situation that was somehow similar to Marianne's?
4. Why does Colonel Brandon suddenly say he cannot participate in the excursion? (*He has received a letter about business to which he must attend.*) What is Willoughby's reaction (p. 55)? (*He makes a snide comment about Brandon's trying to avoid catching cold.*) In what tone do you imagine him making this comment? (*sarcastic*)
5. Why do you suppose Colonel Brandon does not detail the nature of the business that takes him away? How would you respond to Mrs. Jennings' probing if you were Colonel Brandon? What does Mrs. Jennings suggest about the nature of his "business"? (*She implies that he is going to see his illegitimate daughter.*)
6. What is Willoughby's attitude when he announces that he must leave for London? (*He seems embarrassed.*) Why does his departure disturb Elinor and her mother? (*He doesn't promise to return and visit.*) What could he have said to set their minds at ease?
7. What theory does Mrs. Dashwood concoct to explain why Willoughby is leaving so suddenly? (*She wonders whether he and Marianne have argued and speculates that his benefactor, Miss Smith, disapproves of the relationship.*) Do you think Mrs. Dashwood is right? Does she blame Willoughby for his behavior? (*no*) Does Elinor? (*She says she wants to think he has his reasons, but feels he should not conceal his engagement to Marianne.*) Does Marianne? (*apparently not*) Do you?