

Pride and Prejudice: Putting Universal Themes in Modern Dress

Lesson Plan

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: Literature

Lesson Duration: Two class periods

Student Objectives

- Understand that classics are pieces of literature whose universal themes continue to make them popular long after they were authored.
- Discuss universal themes of *Pride and Prejudice*.
- Explore universal themes in *Pride and Prejudice* by updating selected scenes from it to the 21st century.

Materials

- Discovery School video on *unitedstreaming: Great Books: Pride and Prejudice*
Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.

Selected clips that support this lesson plan:

- A Woman's Only Career: The Bennet Sisters and the Prospect of Marriage (02:01)
- Elizabeth "Lizzy" Bennet: An Independent Spirit (02:10)
- The Intimate Details of Life: The Love-Related Travails of the Bennet Sisters (01:43)
- Lizzy Falls in Love with Darcy, Despite Myriad Obstacles (03:50)
- Miscellaneous scenes that your community would consider acceptable from *Clueless*, the 1995 movie loosely based on Austen's *Emma*

Procedures

1. Ask the class why some works of literature are considered "classics," emphasizing the idea of universal themes. Have the class talk about some universal themes that have helped the novel *Pride and Prejudice* retain its popularity. For example:
 - It's a great love story with twists, turns, and obstacles, and the right girl(s) and guy(s) ending up with each other.
 - In addition to the multifaceted Elizabeth and Darcy, the novel presents stock characters we all understand (the interfering, well-intentioned mother; the pompous Mr. Collins; the snobbish Miss Caroline Bigley; and the scoundrel Wickham).

2. Once students have talked about universal themes in the plot and characters, have them work as a class to update these elements into a modern-day scenario. For example, what might happen in a modern-day love story with similar characters and challenges? What might a modern-day Mr. Collins act and look like? To illustrate what you have in mind, you could give students a summary of Austen's novel *Emma* and show appropriate scenes from the 1995 movie *Clueless*, which is loosely based on the novel.
3. Then with the class, divide the modern-day scenario into a number of scenes that, taken together, will cover the entire plot line. Assign a different scene to each of several small groups who will draft an actual script for it.
4. Go over with the class important elements of a dramatic scene:
 - The script of a scene must contain both dialogue (the conversations and asides of the characters) and stage directions (descriptions of setting, characters, and action). Some descriptions of setting and of characters are put into expository dialogue.
 - The characters might not resolve a problem or an issue in a scene, but a scene must contain a problem or an issue that the characters are considering, and a scene must end in a satisfying way rather than simply trail off.
5. Raise with the class the following questions about updating literature:
 - How trendy should the locales and clothes be?
 - Will the characters speak in a local dialect or in a language understandable throughout the English-speaking world?
 - How do adapters handle content that in the 21st century may be considered sexist, but that is critical to the plot or theme as envisioned by the original author nearly two hundred years ago?
6. After groups have completed their first drafts, share with them a checklist such as the following, giving them time to revise as necessary so that they can answer "yes" to all the questions.
 - CONTENT: Does the dialogue or do the stage directions clearly show the characters contemplating and dealing with a problem or an issue? Does the scene end naturally, rather than artificially?
 - STYLE: Is the dialogue realistic and easy for an actor to say?
 - GRAMMAR, USAGE, MECHANICS: Have I checked to make sure capitalization, spelling, and matters such as agreement, comparison, and pronoun reference are correct?
7. The groups will read or perform their adaptations, in time order, in front of the class. Here are pointers for how to proceed:
 - Each student in a group should get a copy of that group's final manuscript.

- The members of the group should use their scripts to read the scene for the rest of the class. They may use props during their reading. As appropriate, actors should read or perform stage directions.
8. Once each group has performed, the audience should comment on strengths of the adaptation and parts of it that were unclear or need improvement.

Discussion Questions

1. Throughout *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen makes many statements about personal relationships. What are these statements? Are they still valid today? Why or why not?
2. The members of British society in *Pride and Prejudice* are very class conscious. Debate whether class consciousness is a part of American society. If not, do you think that affects our enjoyment and understanding of Austen's novel? Why or why not?
3. Debate whether Elizabeth Bennet would still be considered a remarkable woman in the modern-day United States.
4. Although its setting and characters are certainly "dated," *Pride and Prejudice* has remained a popular novel for almost 200 years. Why do you think this is the case?

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Students' script contains all key ingredients (themes, actions, characters) from the selected section of the text; script clearly introduces a problem or an issue and develops or resolves it; actors read very clearly and in a well-paced manner.
- 2 points: Students' script contains most key ingredients from the selected section of the text; script introduces but does not develop a problem or an issue; actors read clearly in a well-paced presentation of the scene.
- 1 point: Students' script omits key ingredients from the selected section of the text; script does not focus on a problem or an issue; actors read poorly.

Vocabulary

appraisal

Definition: An act or instance of assessment.

Context: When Elizabeth is able to come to a true appraisal of Mr. Darcy, she realizes his fine qualities and accepts his marriage proposal.

astute

Definition: Having or showing shrewdness and perspicacity.

Context: Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* includes astute observations about the nature of love and marriage.

degradation

Definition: Decline to a low, destitute, or demoralized state; moral or intellectual decadence.

Context: Mr. Darcy feels that a connection with Elizabeth's unpolished family will be a source of degradation.

discernment

Definition: The quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is obscure.

Context: Elizabeth prides herself on her discernment when judging people and must learn that she has made a mistake in the case of Mr. Darcy.

orchestrate

Definition: To arrange or combine so as to achieve a desired or maximum effect.

Context: Mr. Darcy orchestrated accidental meetings in order to have contact with Elizabeth.

scoundrel

Definition: A disreputable person.

Context: The scoundrel Mr. Wickham lies, cheats, and takes advantage of innocent people.

suitor

Definition: One who courts a woman or seeks to marry her.

Context: Jane Austen is believed to have had one or two serious suitors in her life, but she never married.

unrequited

Definition: Not reciprocated or returned in kind.

Context: For some time, Mr. Darcy had to live with the knowledge that his love for Elizabeth was unrequited.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Language Arts – Reading: Uses the general skills and strategies of the reading process.
- Language Arts – Reading: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts.



- Language Arts—Writing: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process; uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing
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Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the [Discoveryschool.com](http://www.discoveryschool.com) Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>

