

Jane Austen

Sense *and* Sensibility



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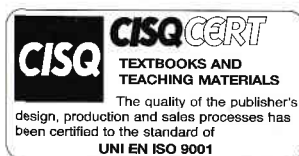
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FCE	First Certificate in English Examination-style exercises
T: GRADE 8	Trinity-style exercises (Grade 8)
Chapters 1, 2, 3, 6, 8 and 9 are recorded.	
	These symbols indicate the beginning and end of the
	extracts linked to the listening activities.



Portrait of Jane Austen.

About the Author

Jane Austen was born in 1775 at Steventon in Hampshire, south-west England, where her father was the local vicar. The family moved to Bath in 1801 but returned to Hampshire after Mr Austen's

death in 1805. Jane, her mother and her sister lived together in Hampshire for the rest of Jane's life.

Her life was exceptionally quiet – very little happened to her – and yet many now regard her as the greatest British novelist of the nineteenth century. As a girl, she read the great novelists of the time and was particularly interested in Romantic poetry. She began writing at the age of fifteen. Her first work of fiction, *Love and Friendship*, was a parody¹ of Richardson.² Other pieces from the

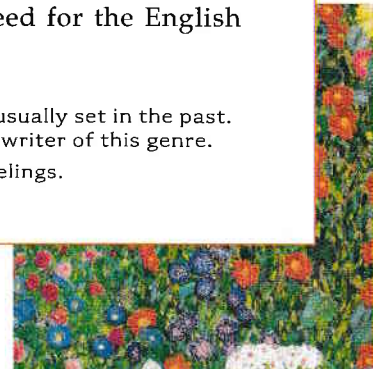
1. **parody** : an imitation that ridicules the original in a comical and exaggerated way.
2. **Samuel Richardson** : (1689-1761) the author of *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748).

1790s are parodies of the excessive sensibility of much late eighteenth-century literature. *Northanger Abbey*, her first full-length novel, was a parody of Ann Radcliffe and the Gothic novel¹ in general, and was not published until 1818, after her death. *Sense and Sensibility* was begun in 1797, when Jane Austen was twenty-two, but was not published until 1811. *Pride and Prejudice* was begun in 1796 and published after revision in 1813. *Mansfield Park* was begun in 1811 and published in 1814. *Emma* was begun in 1814 and published in 1816. *Persuasion* was begun in 1815 and published in 1818, after her death.

In her early works Austen parodies the work of other writers. Her later novels, however, develop her own ideas of how novels should be written and life should be lived. Unlike the Romantic poets and Gothic novelists, who did everything to excess, Jane Austen believed that restraint,² moderation, and decorum³ were the highest literary qualities. She valued the same characteristics in life.

The American poet Ralph Waldo Emerson criticised Jane Austen, saying that her only interest was in marriage. Similarly, many critics have commented that she never wrote about the French Revolution or the Napoleonic wars. However, some more recent critics regard Jane Austen's work as part of an attempt to prevent a revolution happening in England. At the time many English people believed the French Revolution was a result of the French aristocracy's cruel and immoral way of ruling. Jane Austen's novels can be seen as a reaction to this; they often emphasise the need for the English

1. **Gothic novel** : a type of horror/mystery novel, usually set in the past. Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823) was the best-known writer of this genre.
2. **restraint** : (here) the control or limitation of feelings.
3. **decorum** : polite, controlled behaviour.



aristocracy to behave with decorum, in a manner appropriate to their positions in society. Nothing excessive or sensational ever happens in her novels. On the other hand, they have the same artificial comic qualities as Shakespeare's comedies; her novels often end in multiple marriages, for example.

Austen's work is often considered modern, since she is more concerned with changes of opinion than with actual outward events. On the one hand, *Sense and Sensibility* is like a morality tale about the dangers of excessive sensibility (that is how it began in 1797), although the final novel is much more complex than that. Elinor's



Jane Austen's House, Chawton, Hampshire.

self-control is often looked at ironically, such as when she talks about the weather during Edward's visit towards the end of the novel. Marianne's spontaneity is often absolutely right and seen to be so by her author, as when she objects to Mrs Ferrars's horrible treatment of Elinor. *Sense and Sensibility*, therefore, is an exploration of the qualities named in its title, but it gives no easy answers.

1 Decide if these sentences are true (T) or false (F), and then correct the false ones.

- | | T | F |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Jane Austen lived in Bath all her life. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2 As a girl, she didn't like reading. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3 Her first full-length novel was a parody of Ann Radcliffe and the Gothic novel. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 4 All her novels are parodies of other writers' work. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 5 She was criticised for writing endlessly about the French Revolution. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 6 Her literary form is based on the values of harmony, moderation and decorum. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 7 Like Shakespeare's comedies, her novels often end in multiple marriages. | ☐ | ☐ |
| 8 Jane Austen's <i>Sense and Sensibility</i> is no more than a simple morality tale. | ☐ | ☐ |

A note on the novel's title

In the 18th and early 19th century, 'sense' mostly referred to reason and restraint, while 'sensibility' mostly referred to emotion. A 'sensible' person reacted with a spontaneous show of emotions; it was easy to see his/her feelings. In modern-day English, and in this version of Jane Austen's novel, we use the noun 'sensitivity' instead of 'sensibility' and the adjective 'sensitive' instead of 'sensible'. The modern adjective 'sensible', on the other hand, is used to describe a person with good common sense. Through the characters in *Sense and Sensibility*, in particular Elinor and Marianne, Jane Austen explores the merits and limitations of these qualities.

1 Work on your own. Make a brief list of examples of:

- 1 behaviour which you consider emotional, sensitive and perfectly acceptable
- 2 behaviour which you consider exaggerated and excessive

Then compare your lists in small groups and with the whole class.

2 Match the words in the box below with the correct definition (1-7).

will property income interest penniless
fortune owner rent

- 1 a legal document naming the people you want to give money or property to when you die
- 2 a very large amount of money
- 3 poor, without any money
- 4 money received from work or investments
- 5 money paid for the use of a house
- 6 someone in possession of something
- 7 the profit made on money that you have invested

CHAPTER ONE

The Dashwoods



For many generations, the Dashwood family had lived in Norland, a fine English country house in Sussex. The owner had no children of his own, so he made a will leaving all his property to his nephew Mr Henry Dashwood and invited Henry and his family, a wife and three daughters, to live at Norland. Ten years later, old Mr Dashwood died. This was no surprise, since he was very old and had been in bad health for some time. The following year, Henry Dashwood died too, which was a great shock to his family, as he was only forty-five and had always seemed in good health.

The day after her husband's funeral, Mrs Dashwood asked her daughters to come to the drawing-room.¹ 'I've something important to tell you,' she said.

Elinor, at nineteen, was intelligent and thoughtful. Marianne, who was three years younger, was generous and lively, but she was

1. **drawing room** : the room in a large house, often used for relaxation and entertaining guests.