Pride and Prejudice Intro

“Single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor – which is one very strong argument in favour of matrimony.” – Jane Austen, 1816

- In the early 1800s, few middle-class women could choose not to marry or to marry simply for love.
- Women could not enter occupations and earn their own living; one might become a governess, but this job paid little and was similar to a servant in status. A few middle class women did write, like Jane Austen, but they seldom made enough money to live on, and few women inherited wealth. (Property and money were passed down through men.) → Marriage was the only path to financial security.
- Women devoted themselves to attracting a husband. A well-rounded education was not essential, since women would spend their time in the home.
- P&P takes place in England in the early 1800s, during a time known as the Regency period (this refers to George IV, the ruler during this time – he was a regent, or substitute monarch).
- Most of the novel’s action occurs in the homes of middle and upper class families living in the countryside not far from London.
- Mr. Bingley’s sisters in P&P want him to buy an estate. Desirable land was often difficult to buy because such estates were often passed down within families.
- Social custom: a gentleman was always introduced to a lady, never the other way around.
- Austen’s depictions were especially realistic because she limited herself to the society she knew best and to a woman’s view of the world.
- P&P is Austen’s finest work; an early draft was titled First Impressions.
- Clothing: Dresses were high-waisted and buttoned down the back. Frocks and other dresses were made of muslin or other light material. White was a popular color. Apparel was much looser and more natural than the bell-shaped fashions that developed later in the century. Men wore linen shirts with stiff neckbands and vests. They also wore high-cut, long-tailed riding coats.