

Fremont Great Books Book Club
Discussion Questions for "Sense and Sensibility" by Jane Austen
December 20, 2025

HAPPY 250TH BIRTHDAY, JANE AUSTEN!

1. "Sense and Sensibility" can be viewed as a debate between the principles of rationalism guided by reason and those of Romanticism guided by instinct and emotion. How are the qualities of sense and sensibility represented in the main and supporting characters? Is the final title, "Sense and Sensibility" a more suitable title than the original, "Elinor and Marianne?"
2. Who are the hero and heroine of the novel? Is Elinor too good to be true, too perfect? Is Marianne too flawed to be the heroine?
3. Which character(s) undergo the most growth? Do any characters undergo a "moment of recognition" of who they are (or aren't)?
4. It has been said that Sense and Sensibility is a novel full of secrets. Is the author critiquing English society of the early 1800s by revealing the impact of these secrets?
5. Most of the upper-class characters in the books are relatively well-off and discuss and often worry about their income and others' financial matters. Some characters go so far as to be greedy, such as the master class in Persuasion in which Fanny Dashwood convinces her husband to get out of his promise to take care of his half-sisters financially. Is Jane Austen merely reporting or critiquing the ways of the upper class in the early nineteenth century?
6. Does Jane Austen represent the country or the city as a place of higher morality?
7. A turn of the century review describes Mrs. Jennings as a character it is "equally delightful to have met on paper and not to have met in the flesh." Why is it delightful to spend time reading about a character who would be tedious in person?
8. What do you think of Willoughby's confession towards the end? Why does Elinor bend her opinion about his basic character? Does Jane Austen change her mind about him? Does she want the reader to change their mind about him?
9. Was the melodramatic story of Eliza Williams and her mother a satire or an important way of moving the plot forward? Why did Austen omit the rest of the story about Eliza and Willoughby's child?
10. Critic William H. Galperin characterized Brandon's pursuit of Marianne as "insistent, if sinister." Willoughby's final conversation to Elinor reference anonymous informants who can only be Colonel Brandon: "Mrs. Smith had somehow or other been informed" Willoughby says, of his affair with Eliza, and later "some vague report" of Marianne reaches his fiancée. Is it possible that Colonel Brandon is the evil mastermind behind the entire plot?
11. Does the novel have a happy ending? Why do you think Lucy is able to surmount class to achieve a higher place in society? Does sense triumph over sensibility, or is Austen sympathetic to both perspectives? What does the novel say about love at first sight and true love?

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SOURCES AND LINKS

About the book

[Sense and Sensibility family tree by shakko.jpg - Wikimedia Commons](#)

[Jane Austen Society of North America \(JASNA\) Discussion Questions](#)

[ReadingGroupGuides Discussion Questions](#)

[LitCharts Wealth, Greed, and Class](#)

About the author

[Jane Austen Advent Calendar](#) of YouTube videos from Dr. Octavia Cox.

[Jane Austen House in Chawton, Hampshire: monthly podcast](#) about Jane's works and life

“Jane Austen at home : a biography” by Lucy Worsley

“Jane Austen's bookshelf : a rare book collector's quest to find the women writers who shaped a legend” by Rebecca Romney

“Jane Austen, the Secret Radical” by Helena Kelly

“The Chawton Letters” by Jane Austen

“A Jane Austen Education: how six novels taught me about love, friendship, and the things that really matter” by William Deresiewicz

“Jane on the brain : exploring the science of social intelligence with Jane Austen” by Wendy Jones