

## ENGLISH ADVANCED: MODULE A

### Exploring Connections – ‘Pride and Prejudice’ and ‘Letters to Alice’

---

Throughout history, and still today, young women strive to become more aware of their identity so they are prepared to fulfil their role in the world. This role, and the means to obtaining it, is different for individuals. However, the process leading to self-knowledge, which ultimately leads to fulfilment and happiness, is sought after by all. Having an understanding of one's social responsibilities and the impact of positive relationships is valued in the context of Pride and Prejudice, written by Jane Austen. These ideas are further shaped and illuminated in Letters to Alice, written by Fay Weldon.

The text Pride and Prejudice further emphasises the value of the understanding of one's social responsibilities. Charlotte Lucas, Elizabeth's dear friend and pragmatic where Elizabeth is romantic, is almost six years older than Elizabeth and is aware that she must venture to marry to ensure she does not fall burden to her parents. Charlotte saw Mr Collins, neither sensible nor agreeable as tolerable. Through the indirect and direct reporting of the consciousness of the heroine in the following quote, “...it was impossible for that friend to be tolerably happy in the lot she had chosen.” (Page 141), Austen effectively conveys Elizabeth's inability to understand the profound significance of Charlotte embracing her final attempts to marry. It is apparent that Elizabeth looks at the marriage in a broader perspective, without taking into consideration the negatives of being an unmarried woman, with no wealth and land for support. Nevertheless, the events experienced by Elizabeth throughout the novel alter her judgment of Charlotte and Mr Collins, which evidently demonstrates the understanding of one's social responsibilities resulting in self education. “Elizabeth could safely say that it was a great happiness where that was the case.” (Page 238), is a quote which illustrates Elizabeth's transformation through the use of indirect reporting of the heroine's consciousness. It is seen that Elizabeth understands her ultimate understanding of her purpose in the world, which reinforces the constant value despite changes in context, time and place.

Likewise, Alice's transformation to understanding her social responsibilities is apparent when she begins to value writing. In the beginning of the novel, Alice is naive and pessimistic about writing. Weldon begins her defence of Jane Austen, literature and reading, since these are vital assistants to the education and personal growth of a young woman. “...and you are obliged to read Jane Austen; that you find her boring, petty and irrelevant...” (Page 1), foreshadows Aunt Fay's detailed description of the extended metaphor of ‘The City of Invention’ to help educate Alice on the value of literature from the past. It is through this quote that the reader is given an insight into Alice's opinion of literature and how her Aunt attempts to persuade her impression in order to discover her purpose in life. However, through the didactic 14 letters of the novel, it is clear through Aunt Fay's replies, that they have illustrated Alice's journey from ignorance to knowledge. The final two letters demonstrate Alice's accomplishments in becoming a writer, and how the changes in context, time and place have highlighted the value of understanding her social responsibilities. The quote, “I still maintain that it is better to read than not to read” (Page 148), further emphasises the continued growth that Alice has to complete; however, she understands that Alice has come to value literature and her social responsibilities.

It is through an understanding and connection of any two personalities that positive relationships are formed. Austen draws on her opinion that in order for a positive relationship to develop, there must be a meeting of minds, rather than just love and physical attraction, which is seen through Lydia and Wickham. However, Elizabeth Bennet, although witty and intelligent, is rather naive at the commencement of the novel. Although she values the reading of books, which ultimately is a metaphor for the ability to read one's character, her initial prejudice towards Darcy contradicts this. Therefore, it is clear that Elizabeth's emotions dominate her logic and ultimately must endeavour to gain equilibrium between both in order to be transformed as an individual. Elizabeth's initial impression of Darcy which is demonstrated through the tone, “He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world” (Page 11), reinforces her dislike of him, which ultimately led to her

continued misjudgements of Darcy and Wickham. The frequent use of dialogue at the beginning of the novel is effective, as its spontaneous nature allows for mistaken judgements, which characters must then learn from in order to develop their self.

The letter Elizabeth receives from Darcy acts as a mechanism for change, as it provides her with a new perspective, allowing her to form more reasonable opinions of his character. The correction of this letter further reinforces the value of positive relationships and it is seen that Darcy is a catalyst for Elizabeth. The following quote, “*She respected, she esteemed, she was grateful to him...*” (Page 291) demonstrates her journey from ignorance to knowledge through Austen’s use of repetition in the word ‘she’. The narrator is clearly emphasising the key point that Elizabeth has been educated about Darcy’s disposition, which ultimately depicts the importance of positive relationships.

Similarly, Alice also experiences a process of fulfilment in order to attain her rightful place in the world as an educated, young woman with a rewarding career. However, she encounters the failed drafts of her novel. Due to the presence of Alice as the audience and by having only the point of view by Aunt Fay, the ideas she raises become more pertinent. It is only through her Aunt’s mentoring that Alice is able to be educated and her character transformed, “*You must carve your living self as sharply into the Rock of Eternity as you can*” (Page 143). By articulating the fastness of life through the use of symbolism, she is urging Alice to be as knowledgeable and well-read as possible as she believes it will further the depth of her existence. The acceptance by publishers of Alice’s novel suggests that she has matured and developed by the conclusion of the novel. “*The rest is up to you*” (Page 146), effectively depicts the ‘motherly’ tone used by Weldon to convey the emphasis and guidance portrayed by Aunt Fay’s words. It is through the transformation of Alice’s writing ability and personal growth, that the value of positive relationships has remained invariable as she searches for her place in the world.

Consequently, it is apparent through both Pride and Prejudice and Letters to Alice, that despite the different context of the setting, time and place the values in the texts that both heroines are seeking remain constant