PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Objectives

Students should understand the following:

1. Classics are those pieces of literature that continue to be popular long after they were published.
2. Classics tend to have universal themes.
3. Jane Austen’s writing has been updated and dramatized and, most likely, will continue to be.

Materials

• For this lesson, you will need:
  • The novel Pride and Prejudice;
  • Miscellaneous scenes that your community would consider acceptable from Clueless, the recent teen movie loosely based on Austen’s Emma.

Procedures

1. This project will give students an opportunity to demonstrate their familiarity with Pride and Prejudice by updating a selected scene from it to the 21st century. Begin this activity by asking students the following question:

   Although its setting and characters are certainly dated, Pride and Prejudice has remained a popular novel since its publication in 1813.
   Why do you think it has retained its popularity?

2. After giving students some time to think about the question of Pride and Prejudice’s enduring popularity, ask students to list the elements of the novel that are universal:
   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 but ridiculously foolish mother; the pompous Mr. Collins; the snobbish Miss Caroline Bigley; and the scoundrel Wickham).

3. Once students have distilled the plot and characters, have them work as a class to update these elements into a modern-day scenario. To illustrate what you have in mind, consider showing appropriate scenes from the movie Clueless, made in the 1990s and loosely based on Austen’s novel Emma.
4. 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.

5. Go over with the class the following important elements of a dramatic scene:
The script of a scene must contain both dialogue (the conversations and sides of the characters) and stage directions (descriptions of setting, characters, and action). Not all descriptions show up in stage directions, however; sometimes playwrights drop descriptions of settings and of characters right into characters’ 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.

6. 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 smacks of sexism but which is critical to the plot or theme as envisioned by the original author nearly two hundred years ago?

7. After groups have completed their first drafts, share with them a checklist such as the following, giving them time to review 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?

8. Each group should get a chance to read its adaptation 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.

9. Once each group has performed, the audience should comment on strengths of the adaptation and parts of it that were unclear or need improvement.
Adaptations
Instead of having small groups work on their own to adapt different sections of the scenario, select one section for the whole class to work on together – with you.

Discussion Questions
1. Consider the kinds of marriages that appear throughout *Pride and Prejudice*, including the marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy. What kinds of relationships between a man and a woman did Jane Austen idealize?

2. Throughout *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen makes many statements about personal relationships. What are these statements? Are they still valid today? Why or why not?

3. The members of British society in *Pride and Prejudice* are very class conscious. Debate whether class consciousness is a part of your society. If not, do you think that affects the enjoyment and understanding of Austen’s novel? Why or why not?

4. Identify the main characters in the novel and discuss what you feel is Austen’s attitude toward each of them. Are the verbal portraits she paints flattering or otherwise?

5. Debate whether Elizabeth Bennet would still be considered a remarkable woman in the modern-day United States.

6. Although its setting and characters are certainly “dated,” *Pride and Prejudice* has remained a popular novel for 200 years. Why do you think this is the case?

Evaluation
You can evaluate each group’s scene and performance using the following three-point rubric:

- **Three points**: script contains all key ingredients 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.

- **Two points**: 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.

- **One point**: script omits key ingredients from the selected section of the text; script does not focus on a problem or an issue; actors read poorly.

You may ask your students to contribute to the assessment rubric by determining what constitutes a clear and well-paced performance.

Adapted from: http://school.discoveryeducation.com/lessonplans/programs/prideandprejudice/index.html