

Emma woodhouse character annalysis essay sample

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Emma Woodhouse was once described by Jane Austen as a “ heroine whom no one but myself will much like” (iv). She seems to have it all, the beauty, the wealth, and the intelligence, and uses it to her advantage. No one can seem to find any part of her that needs to be fixed or changed. “ The real evils indeed of Emma’s situation were the power of having rather too much of her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself” (4).

Though she is not vain of her looks, she prides herself on being exceptionally witty and clever and surrounds herself with those who are slower than she is.

Emma’s problems stem from having no outlet for her intelligence. She has the freedom and the power, but also the boredom of a high society woman. She wants excitement in life and a chance to use her imagination and intellect. She does not want love for herself, but is perfectly willing to envision love for other people. Faced with one “ success” Emma believes she will always succeed in matchmaking, and expects everyone to act exactly the way she wants them to act. Mr. Elton could not be interested in her because she’s already set him aside for Harriet. She believes Frank Churchill is in love with her because he is a good match, but when she acknowledges that she does not love him, she believes he will immediately fall in love with her friend.

Emma picks Harriet Smith simply because her beauty makes her interesting, and she does not care that she is illegitimate and unintelligent. It is considered an act of charity by those around her, but for Emma it is a chance to have some fun. Instead of making Harriet’s life better, Emma persuades her to decline a good offer of marriage and to pursue a man who would

never love her. Most of the time she has good intentions, but “ who can think of Miss Smith, when Miss Woodhouse is near!” (121). Later, Emma begins to see some of her own faults and resolves to do “ such things no more” (126), even going so far as to command Harriet not to confide in her anymore.

Despite anything distressing that occurred the day before, Emma seems to have forgotten it by morning. Any sorrow or remorse is gone with the sunrise. Her visit to a poor family and declaration that she will think of nothing else all day is promptly forgotten before the day is even gone. With her matchmaking disasters, Emma forgets how sorry she is for Harriet after only a short while. Slowly Emma does begin to have more and more guilt and remorse for her wrongdoings. At a party, Emma gets caught up in a game and thoughtlessly makes a sarcastic remark about Miss Bates, a long time friend of the family. When Mr. Knightly makes her realize the hurt she caused, Emma is very sorry. It is the first time that her remorse lasts through the night, causing her to visit Miss Bates in the morning and apologize. This is a big turning point in Emma’s life because she is setting her wrongs to right instead of believing that everyone has forgotten about it the next day.

Mr. Knightly is Emma’s reality check. Even before Emma realizes she is in love with him, she uses Knightly as the standard of the perfect gentleman. The knowledge that she has been in love with Knightly causes her to see everything differently. She is unsure of herself, but has to put a good face on for the public. Emma even becomes jealous and ashamed of her previous actions fearing that he is in love with Harriet. “ Emma had never known how much of her happiness depended on being first with Mr. Knightly, first in

interest and affection...only the dread of being supplanted, found how inexpressibly important it had been" (383). With the thought of losing Mr. Knightly, Emma begins to drastically rethink everything she held as important. Emma becomes conscious how foolish she had been to try to control everyone's lives based on her whims, even saying that she " has been doomed to blindness" (393).

Her allowances for her own faults help her to see the good things in other people including Mr. Martin. Where she was once adamantly against his marriage to Harriet, Mr. Knightly notices that she has changed her opinion. She responds, " I hope so - for at that time I was a fool" (438). Emma's love for Mr. Knightly borders closely on respect, realizing how often he has turned her in the right direction. To him she says " I am sure you were of use to me...I was very often influenced rightly by you—oftener than I would own at the time. I am very sure you did me good" (427). Instead of arguing just for the fun of it, she even resolves to listen to him more often.

Like her father, Emma hated change, but she is the one that changed the most in Emma, through her own experiences and those around her. In the beginning she finds joy in meddling with the love lives of others, but in the end she is able to find joy in her own love life. Emma was vain, rude, and a bad friend, but for all her faults she has just as much goodness. With the help of Mr. Knightly she begins to genuinely show more of her goodness, thinking of the feelings and situations of others. Jane Austen gradually shows Emma's change of heart and attitude in almost every area of her life making her a more loveable and kind character to her audience.