

# Self knowledge and happiness in pride and prejudice assignment

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Pride and Prejudice written by Jane Austen is centred on characters that either gain self awareness and knowledge or possess none at all. Happiness is found even when one has no understanding of selfhood but the most happy and satisfied people in the novel are those who have self knowledge. People that possess self knowledge understand their strengths and weaknesses and characters that gain self knowledge are able to decipher these characteristics and act upon them.

As marriage was seen as a great achievement for women in their society, happiness in Pride and Prejudice relates to whether one is happy or unhappy in their marriage. Lydia, Mr Wickham and Lady Catherine de Bourg have no self awareness and are unhappy in the novel. The marriage of Lydia and Mr Wickham is one of the unhappy marriages. Mr Wickham and Lydia are both very similar and are both unaware of their faults; they are both careless with money and see no problem with asking their relatives for money.

Lydia as the youngest daughter is well accustomed to having other people look after her and she is dependent on other people. Lydia's lack of self awareness doesn't affect her greatly; she is happy and claims that she loves Wickham. She is very fond of him but he is not fond of her and quickly loses interest, " Wickham's affection for Lydia, was just what Elizabeth had expected to find it; not equal to Lydia's for him. " Lady Catherine de Bourg has no self knowledge. She is full of herself and sees herself very highly; it is obvious she lacks self knowledge.

She makes discourteous comments about other people without thought to their opinions and she also enunciates comments about how she views

herself. Lady Catherine de Bourg is unhappy because she is disappointed that she cannot control everyone despite her position. Austen shows us that people can be happy in different ways through the relationship of Charlotte and Mr Collins. Both Charlotte and Mr Collins do not find comfort in the company of each other and they do not find pleasure in conversing. They are not very intimate and do not display much affection.

Mr Collins wanted to marry one of the Bennet girls because they were his cousins and he was entailed to receive the property. He has no knowledge of himself and this is evident when his proposal of marriage to Elizabeth is refused. Mr Collins did not particularly care who his wife was, he just needed to marry because he is an Anglican parish-man and needs a wife for status. He is incapable of contemplating why Elizabeth would refuse his hand when there are so many economical and social benefits of being his wife, “ He thought too well of himself to comprehend on what motive his cousin could refuse him”.

He was so sure of himself before his rejection that he still cannot contemplate the concept still after Elizabeth has made her refusal quite clear, “...I know it to be the established custom of your sex to reject a man on first application, and perhaps you have even now said as much to encourage my suit”. He is happy and feels satisfied in his marriage to Charlotte. Charlotte just simply wants somebody who is able to look after her and provide her with financial stability. I ask only for a comfortable home”, Charlotte states and we understand that she is happy within her marriage because she knows what she wants; she doesn't want love as she is “ not a

romantic” and “ Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance”. Mrs Bennet also has little if any self awareness and yet she finds happiness. Mrs Bennet is oblivious to her atrocious social behaviour in public; she speaks excessively without thought, always aspires to making what she feels is a ‘ good’ impression but she ultimately embarrasses herself.

Although because she is unaware of her faults she is happy thinking that she is making a difference for the future of her daughters and their prospects of marriage. Near the end of the novel Mr Bennet realizes and acknowledges the mistakes he made financially for the future of his children and his weaknesses. As a father and a husband, Mr Bennet fails. He did not put away and save money for his daughters once he died and was thoughtlessly careless in making this error. He allows his daughters to go unaccompanied to visit officers and walking by themselves.

He does not keep his wife under control, therefore leaving her open to ridicule and he also takes part in this behaviour. He lacks a general concern for the way other people view his family and a lack of care for his daughter’s futures due to his own laziness. He finds no satisfaction or happiness in his wife or daughters apart from Elizabeth who he is extremely fond of. His loss of happiness in his wife is seen when she interrupts him in the library and he says, “ I shall be glad to have the library to myself as soon as possible”, he does not enjoy her company.

He eventually is able to reflect on his decisions and regrets not being a better father and not to be heedless with money, “ I have at last learnt to be cautious”. Elizabeth and Darcy grow as characters throughout the novel and

develop in relation to each other. Darcy is very full of himself and proud but Jane reminds Elizabeth that he has a right to be proud. Darcy is quite sure that Elizabeth would not refuse his hand in marriage that he thinks he has the right to insult her; he refers to him marrying her as “ being a degradation”.

He speaks warmly and openly about how he would be downgraded if he married her but that he was willing to do it anyway because he is so confident and foolish. Her declining his offer of marriage is Darcy’s turning point in the novel. He realizes how wrong he was, “ I have been a selfish being all my life...You shewed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased”. In his letter he states the truth about Mr Wickham and Elizabeth accepts his words because Mr Wickham’s story already had faults in it which Elizabeth had recognized.

Darcy wants Elizabeth to know that her perceived view of him is incorrect and that he is not a bad person contrary to what Elizabeth says. He doesn’t want her to think it was true that he treated his father’s steward with such poor manners. Elizabeth due to her strong prejudice and blindness is completely unaware of Darcy’s changed feelings towards her. She formed such a strong dislike that she did not ever contemplate that he would begin to fancy her; she was blind to his feelings the moment after the ball. Her feelings towards Darcy are influenced by Mr Wickham’s lies.

Regardless of this she knows that she should be very flattered to be fancied by a man of his position, he is higher socially and is associated with the aristocracy, “ she could not be insensible to the compliment of such a man’s

affection" and she feels compassion for him knowing that she would refuse his offer, " she was at first sorry for the pain he was to receive". She tells Darcy her strongest reasons for declining his hand; she has never liked him, he behaved in a very cruel manner to Mr Wickham and he was the cause of the separation of Bingley and Jane.

When Elizabeth receives Mr Darcy's letter she is upheaved because it concerns her that she has thought so highly of her ability to judge characters when she was very wrong, " Till this moment, I never knew myself" and " I, who have prided myself on my discernment! ??? I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity, in useless or blameable distrust. ??? How humiliating is this discovery! " When Elizabeth goes to visit Pemberley she sees what a fine property it is and her feelings immediately begin to change.

When the house keeper speaks with great admiration in reference to Mr Darcy Elizabeth realizes what a good man he is; he is a kind, caring and thoughtful brother to Georgiana, he is generous with his money and takes great care of those who operate for him. Once she overcomes her prejudice and realizes her faults she develops towards Darcy and is then prepared for a more fulfilling happy marriage. People with self awareness can be both happy and unhappy. Mr Bennet has self awareness but he is unhappy because he finds no satisfaction in his family.

Elizabeth and Darcy come to know themselves and develop towards each other and so their marriage has the capacity to hold the greatest happiness.

Also, happiness can be found when you have no self awareness. Charlotte

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has self awareness and knows what she wants and needs and so she is content in her marriage to Mr Collins. Mr Collins has no self awareness but is happy because he has a wife and this is what he aspired to. Ultimately, people who have the most self awareness and knowledge who can grow and learn their weaknesses and faults are the people who will have the most happiness in their lives.