

# Mrs bennet's character in 'pride and prejudice'

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



Analyse Mrs Bennet's character in 'Pride and Prejudice,' by looking closely at her attitude and behaviour. Comment on what you think Mr Darcy and Elizabeth think of her, as well as your own views.

'She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper.' Mrs Bennet, the mother of five girls; Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty and Lydia, most resembles her youngest daughter, Lydia; a shallow and flirtatious girl. Similarly, Mrs Bennet is very excitable and pronounces her fondness for 'red coats' when she was Lydia's age.

This declaration of her affection is quite endearing and reveals Mrs Bennet's younger side. Mrs Bennet and Lydia are the pinnacles of the kind of characters who talk far too much and fuss about silly things. An example demonstrating this aspect of her character is how Mrs Bennet does not worry herself with the moral consequences of Lydia's 'infamous elopement' but fusses about trivial, frivolous things such as wedding clothes and 'where the best warehouses are.'

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This also demonstrates her stupidity and lack of insight into human nature which prevents her from realising how close Mrs Bingley comes to being outright rude. She believes that Mr Bingley's sisters were 'charming women.' Then goes on to comment, 'I never in my life saw anything more elegant than their dresses.' Apart from being utterly wrong about them, she demonstrates perfectly her superficiality. She obviously is taken with the sisters because she sees them dressed incredibly ornately, and knows how rich they are, fogging her view of their personality.

From the very beginning of the novel, Mrs Bennet comes across as a woman obsessed about marriage. The first event in the entire book is Mrs Bennet gossiping about a young man of good fortune, Mr Bingley, who has just moved into the area. Mrs Bennet is already planning for one of her daughters to marry Mr Bingley, even though she has never met him and doesn't know anything about him apart from the fact he is 'a single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year.' She says, 'What a fine thing for our girls!' This clearly shows that Mrs Bennet aims to get her daughters married to wealthy men, not minding if her daughter's love them or if they are nice people or not.

This demonstrates an element of foolishness especially as she of all people should know about the problems of such an 'unsuccessful marriage.' This, along with the evidence of Mrs Bennet's silliness seems to suggest that Mr Bennet married Mrs Bennet for convenience and for her looks rather than for love and her personality. Their love-hate relationship relies upon her gullibility and moodiness, and his love of teasing her which keeps Mr Bennet going. Their barely surviving relationship should have shown Mrs Bennet the defects of a marriage for money and convenience, but she has in fact not learnt anything. She is so determined that she even wants Elizabeth to settle for marrying Mr Collins.

However, her actions could be seen in a very different light. Perhaps it demonstrates her true love for her daughters. Maybe she wants them to marry rich because when Mr Bennet dies they will not inherit the house or any money because they are girls. The law says that the next male relative

has to inherit everything. For this reason Mrs Bennet feels that she needs to secure her daughters future, making sure that they are settled.

Mrs Bennet cannot accept not having her way and uses the blackmail, 'you have no compassion for my nerves' when she is not granted what she wants. One instance when she uses this excuse is when Mr Bennet refuses to speak to Mr Bingley and invite him over. It is very important to Mrs Bennet that Mr Bingley comes over so that she can try and get one of her daughters married to him. But when Mr Bennet gets in the way of her plan by not visiting Mr Bingley, Mrs Bennet shows that she gets very annoyed. The fickle side of her character is displayed when Mr Bennet finally admits that he has seen Bingley. Mrs Bennet's mood changes very suddenly and she immediately gets excited and becomes happier. She says, 'How good it was of you, my dear Mr Bennet,' showing that she is superficial and that her feelings quickly change, cheering up at the thought of being able to marry off one of her daughters. Although it could also be seen that she is just a very determined person, whose resolution is to get her daughters married.

Her determination, however, is sometimes taken a step too far, especially when Jane was invited to Netherfield. Jane requested the carriage to take her to the estate, but Mrs Bennet, excited by the chance for Jane to get to know Mr Bingley better, insisted that she 'had better go on horseback,' because it seemed 'likely to rain.' Mrs Bennet was in fact hoping that it would start to rain, so that Jane would have to stay at Netherfield, therefore having more time to get to know Bingley. Despite her lack of intelligence, this shows a very shrewd, scheming side to her character forming a plan to keep Jane at Netherfield. Furthermore, she could even be interpreted as uncaring. When it

does indeed start to rain, Mrs Bennet's foolishness surfaces, as she comments on it being a 'lucky idea' of hers to have sent Jane on horseback. She shows no regard for Jane's health, but on the contrary, smugly praising herself for the success of her cunning plan. On the surface, she does not seem bothered about her daughter's health, but is more concerned about the achievement of her life's aim; getting her daughters married. In this respect she seems more aware of her responsibilities as a parent than her husband.

Later, she finds out that Jane is unwell, but is not even slightly worried, saying, 'I am not afraid of her dying. People do not die of trifling colds. She will be taken good care of.' Despite her unconcerned exterior, I think it is likely that deep down she really does care about her daughters, even though her number one priority is always to get her daughters married. Evidence of her deep down affection for her daughters is when she goes to Netherfield and 'would have been very miserable' had she found Jane in any danger. Another redeeming feature of Mrs Bennet is that she is loyal, for example when she stuck up for Elizabeth after Mr Darcy had refused to dance with her. She tells Elizabeth to not dance with Darcy next time, even if he asks her. This is perhaps her way of comforting Elizabeth, because she probably understands that Elizabeth must have been offended.

From this point onwards, Mrs Bennet's impression of Darcy changes completely from being 'much handsomer than Mr Bingley' to being a most disagreeable, horrid man, not at all worth pleasing.' Her attitude towards him changes completely, and she forgets that she ever liked him in the first place. This reveals her fickleness and superficial judgement. When she didn't

know him, she presumed that he was a really nice person just because she knew he was rich, but just as easily as she formed her first opinion of him, she changed her mind.

Near the end of the novel she once again changes her opinion of Darcy. Although she has disliked him throughout the whole book, declaring that he is 'so high and so conceited,' she is overjoyed at the news of Elizabeth's engagement to him. She again changes her mind starting to really like him. The rest of the family were worried that she had made the wrong decisions about Darcy and may have been forced to marry him, but Mrs Bennet was not even slightly worried about that. She was just extremely happy that Elizabeth had found a rich husband, and that she only had two more daughters to get married.

Her changeability is also brought to surface through her opinion of Mr Collins. Mr Collins is Mr Bennet's closest male relative, and so is destined to inherit Mr Bennet's house after his death. According to the law, girls could not inherit anything after their father's death and so Mr and Mrs Bennet were relying on the fact that they would bear a son. Unfortunately, after conceiving five girls it became obvious that the possibility of having a son was very unlikely, by when it was already too late to start saving money to pay their daughter's dowry and provide for them for the future. Mrs Bennet particularly didn't like Mr Collins for this reason, as she blames him for inheriting her house, even though it is not his fault. Even before she has met him or found out anything about him, she has already decided that he is an 'odious man', out for what he can get.

She goes on to say to Mr Bennet, 'If I had been you, I should have tried long ago to do something or other about it,' referring to the fact that his estate has been entailed to Mr Collins. From this, it is apparent that Mrs Bennet blames Mr Bennet for their problems, not being clever enough to understand that it is the law and that there is nothing Mr Bennet could do about it. She proclaims that she 'hates false friends,' which is very judgemental of her, but when she realises that Mr Collins wants to marry one of her daughters, her attitude completely changes. She is no longer hostile towards him, and forgets about her grudge against him.

However, Elizabeth, being much more sensible than her mother, refuses the offer of marriage because she understands that marriages without love do not work. She has seen her mother and father 'passing' their lives, not really understanding each other and sees 'the defects of such a marriage.' This decision agitates Mrs Bennet incredibly, who tells Mr Collins that Elizabeth 'is a very headstrong, foolish girl and does not know her own interests; but I will make her know it.' Mrs Bennet is very determined to have Elizabeth marry, and she suspects it would be quite hard to get such an opinionated girl a husband. She is sure that she will be able to persuade or force Elizabeth to accept the offer of matrimony and doesn't understand Elizabeth not wanting to marry Mr Collins or that they are incompatible. The way she sees it is that he has money, and will soon inherit Longbourne, so Elizabeth should accept the offer of marriage. This again seems to suggest that she does not care about her daughter's happiness but is more consumed with her own security for the future.

Mr Collins, having given up on Elizabeth, marries Charlotte Lucas which outrages Mrs Bennet. She irrationally holds Sir William and Lady Lucas responsible for the whole situation, insisting that they must have convinced Elizabeth not to marry Mr Collins, an absurd idea showing how paranoid she is. She often passes blame onto other people, not accepting any responsibility for anything that goes wrong. She is so 'vexed' that she is impulsively rude to Sir William and Lady Lucas, spoiling their friendship because of her jealousy.

Another aspect of her character is that she is very unsubtle and rude. Even though she spends most her time trying to find suitors for her daughters, she generally has the opposite effect and almost drives away suitors entirely. An illustration of her indiscretion is when she visits Jane at Netherfield. She believes that she is being very subtle in insulting Darcy, but in fact she is quite blatant with her insults and gives Darcy the impression that she is very loud in speech, foolish and insensitive.

He is also offended by her lack of breeding and dislikes her since their first meeting at the Ball. He was annoyed at the way that Mrs Bennet would make judgements about people even without knowing them. She declares Mr Darcy to be 'The proudest, most disagreeable man in the world.' Without knowing him, Mrs Bennet had already made out his character, which annoyed him greatly. He also didn't like the way that he would talk loudly about other people, thinking that this was insensitive and completely demonstrated her lack of breeding.

He also considers her to be very foolish, and in his letter to Elizabeth he wrote that he tried to break Bingley and Jane up because of their class



difference. He also commented on the fact that their mother was foolish, and so he could not let Bingley marry Jane.

Elizabeth also considers her mother to be an embarrassment and very foolish. She thinks that her mother is insensitive and not very intelligent for example, when she sent Jane to Netherfield on horseback. Elizabeth was extremely worried about Jane and walked all the way to Netherfield to visit her sister. Her mother embarrasses her on many occasions such as when her mother misunderstands Mr Darcy's comment on country people and reveals hostility towards him. This shows a lack of breeding and Elizabeth 'blushes for her mother,' trying to change the subject. The extreme difference in character and sense between Elizabeth and Mrs Bennet makes Mrs Bennet look even more foolish and stupid.

Mrs Bennet is like a literary caricature of an interfering matchmaker. Her faults are magnified to excessive proportions, making her character almost funny and therefore providing comic relief at tense moments in the play. Her role in the play is to be an obstacle which Darcy needs to overcome and accept in order to show that he truly loves Elizabeth. This is very difficult for Darcy as she is almost his complete opposite. She is silly, obsessive, hysterical and tactless, but in the end he accepts her because of his love for Elizabeth.

In conclusion, Elizabeth, Mr Darcy and the reader may feel that Mrs Bennet is a foolish, insensitive woman, appearing to be loud, superficial and quickly irritated, but equally rapidly calmed down. This is because, throughout the novel, Jane Austen allows her more negative aspects to surface at different times throughout the novel by emphasising them through her words and <https://assignbuster.com/mrs-bennets-character-in-pride-and-prejudice/>

actions. However, I feel that she is in fact a very caring and affectionate mother, who always has her daughter's best interests at heart. Yet, this side of her personality is not often portrayed, forcing Mrs Bennet to be seen as an interfering, thoughtless woman.