

Joseph Luzzi • Jane Austen's *Emma*
Virtual Book Club • August 3, 2023 • Reader's Guide* • © Joseph Luzzi

Please note: the below are only intended to help you “get inside” the book—please do not feel compelled to answer them in full, unless you wish to, and if there are questions or elements in the book that you don't understand, no worries, we will explain all when we meet for our Live Presentation on this new selection!

1. Why do you think that a novel like Jane Austen's *Emma*, published in 1816, has enjoyed such ongoing critical and commercial success for so long?
2. How would you describe Jane Austen's literary style? More specifically, how does she manage to use a technique like free indirect speech so effectively?
3. Jane Austen wrote during the age of Romanticism, a period celebrated for its interest in the power of the natural world, the force of the imagination, and the intricacies of personal identity. Do you think of *Emma* as a “Romantic” novel? Or could one also argue that the novel has roots in the era prior to Romanticism, the Enlightenment, which was known for its emphasis on rationality, sociability, and moral philosophy?
4. What do you take to be the central theme of *Emma*, and why?
5. What are the defining elements of the social and economic world of *Emma*? How do you think that Austen wishes us to reflect on issues of class as they relate to the novel?
6. *Emma* begins:

Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.

...

The real evils, indeed, of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself; these were the disadvantages which threatened alloy to her many enjoyments. The danger, however, was at present so unperceived, that they did not by any means rank as misfortunes with her.

How does the passage anticipate some of the novel's main concerns that are to follow? What aspects of Emma's character do these words reveal or suggest? What are the keywords in the above, and why?

7. What does *Emma* reveal about the realities of women's lives in Austen's time? How does the novel compel us to think about issues of gender and female identity?
8. What are the key qualities of Mr. Knightley? How does he relate to other male characters in Austen's novels like Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* or Colonel Brandon in *Sense and Sensibility*?
9. Why do you think Austen is so often praised for her psychological insights? Can you please give an example from the text that reveals her capacity in that domain?

10. What aspect of *Emma* do you find to be the most relevant to our world, and why?

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