

The Jane Austen Book & Film Club

Emma

1. Although we are first introduced to Emma as “handsome, clever, rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition,” we soon find out that instead of looking for her own mate she would rather spend her time and energy arranging romantic matches for almost everyone else. Does Emma’s matchmaking stem from a sense of altruism? From selfishness? How would Emma arrange matches in modern times? How did she do it in her own time?
2. How do Knightley and Emma’s contrasting views on her matchmaking and the nature of “gentility” reflect a difference in their values? How is Knightley’s relationship with Emma different from the other social relationships that Emma is inclined to cultivate?
3. Emma’s taste in friends is somewhat unpredictable. While she has little in common with Harriet Smith, she relies on her companionship; however, Emma tends to alienate some women, such as Jane Fairfax, who are perceived to be her “equals.” What does Emma tend to look for in a friend? Why was she so intent on befriending Harriet Smith?
4. Emma discourages Harriet from accepting Mr. Martin’s proposal on the basis of his not being a “real gentleman.” How does Emma (either directly or indirectly) define a real gentleman? How is a real gentleman characterized today? Which male characters in *Emma* would live up to your personal definition of a gentleman and/or Emma’s?
5. At what point in the film version of *Emma* does it become obvious to viewers that there is an attraction between Emma and Knightley? When did you begin to suspect this attraction as you read the novel? When do you think Emma figures out that she is attracted to Knightley?
6. From the first chapter of the novel, Emma and her father repeatedly refer to marriage as little more than a disruption in one’s life. (“Matrimony, as the origin of change, was always disagreeable...”). Why do you think Emma feels as if she has nothing to gain from marriage? How do you think her home life influences her thoughts of marriage? What makes her change her attitude?

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7. The Emma we know at the end of the novel and film has traveled a great emotional distance from the young woman we meet in the opening scenes. How did she get there? Which particular revelations or tough lessons did Emma experience that contributed to her evolution in character? What other characters in the novel contributed to her growth?
8. The novel ends with Emma's satisfying mental contrast between her new husband Knightley and her former infatuation Frank Churchill. Does the novel's ending truly represent a happy ending or is it too tinged with irony to allow the reader to celebrate Emma's good fortune? How does the film's final scene leave you feeling?