

A Sense and Sensibility Teaching Guide



Examining Kate Hamill's adaptation of Jane Austen's classic novel

By: Jenna Dobbelsteyn

SAINT JOHN
THEATRE COMPANY

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Activities and Discussions Prepared and Organized by:

Jenna Dobbelsteyn

Bachelor of Arts: English Honours Student - University of New Brunswick

jdobbel2@unb.ca

Things to Think About if you are seeing Saint John Theatre Company's *Sense and Sensibility*

1. Kate Hamill's adaptation is different from the book.

- Jane Austen's novel is full of subtlety and nuance, while Kate Hamill's adaptation is flashy and exciting.
- A play adapted from a novel must include all important plot points from the novel without running too long, so Kate Hamill needed to carefully choose details from the novel while keeping the heart of the novel alive. **(See page 8 for a summary of the plot and list of characters. See page 16 for an examination activity on adaptation)**

2. This play is fast moving!

- In Kate Hamill's adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*, the play moves between scenes and locations very quickly.
- To assist in fast scene changes, production teams must use creative ways to assist in smooth transitions. In what ways does the Saint John Theatre Company accomplish this?

3. Some actors play more than one character.

- Apart from the actors playing Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, most actors play more than one character. Kate Hamill's adaptation has 18 speaking characters played by only 12 cast members in Saint John Theatre Company's production.
- Pay attention to how the actors use tone of voice, movement, costume pieces, and props to embody different characters throughout the course of the play.

4. Lighting, Colour, and Music.

- Lighting, colour, and music changes are often used to affect the mood of scenes in a dramatic production. Watch for how the Saint John Theatre Company uses lighting and music to cue changes in mood. **(See page 13 for an activity connecting lighting and set to mood)**

5. A chorus of gossips

- In the play, there is a chorus featuring a group of high society gossips. The Gossips comment on the events of the play and represent the thoughts of the community surrounding the characters of *Sense and Sensibility*. **(See page 18 for an examination on the functions of a chorus)**
- Think about gossip and its involvement in society today. Do The Gossips in the play show any echoes of how gossip travels in today's time?

6. Set

- The Imperial Theatre has many interesting features that allow for sets to go beyond the traditional method of being built from the ground up.

- A “fly” in a theatre is a system of wires where set pieces can be hung above the stage and lowered down when they are needed. *Sense and Sensibility* will make use of the fly, with set pieces lowering in and out of view.
- The fly will store trees, walls, and other set pieces made of wood that will be lowered onto the stage. The walls and widows have an open and simple style and will be tall to make use of the space available on the Imperial stage.
- When watching the play, think about how the texture and style of the set impact mood and atmosphere. Does the atmosphere change noticeably when the set is changed?
- Watch for creative ways that the production makes use of the set. Some sections may be used as storage for costumes, props, and more!

7. Costumes

- As mentioned above, there will be actors who play more than one character in *Sense and Sensibility*. Watch for costume pieces that are added and taken away when actors are changing characters.
- Pay attention to how costumes can be used to communicate traits about the characters. **(See page 21 for an activity connecting costumes to character traits)**

8. Differences in Society

- Money, marriage, and land ownership were treated differently in the time of *Sense and Sensibility* compared to how they are treated today. Pay close attention to the ways the characters emphasize these differences in the play. **(See pages 10 through 12 for era-specific information on land entailment, money, and marriage)**
- Cellphones and internet were not available in the time of *Sense and Sensibility*, so how people interact with one another in the play will be different than the common place online interactions of 2023.
- Watch for how the characters interact with one another in the play. All forms of communication will be through in-person visits and letters. Imagine that! **(See page 25 for a writing activity about the spread of information in Austen’s time)**

Your Personal *Sense and Sensibility* Dictionary –

When words from this dictionary appear throughout the guide, they appear in [blue](#).

Annuity (12): income from capital investment paid regularly; an amount of money earned per year.

Barton Park: the estate of Sir John Middleton, on which is Barton Cottage where the Dashwood ladies move after leaving Norland.

Beau/Beaux: eligible bachelors interested in courtship (beaux is the plural form).

Bequeath (11): to leave or give, especially by will after one's death.

Bleed (82): to lose blood medicinally

Call (calling) (29): to visit someone, usually for a short time.

Christian name: a first name without the use of a title, to be used only when addressing family or close relations (leaving out Miss, Mr., or Sir when addressing someone). The use of a Christian name is inappropriate in the wrong circumstances.

Disinherited (77): to deprive or dispossess of an inheritance; 'to cut off from an hereditary right'; to prevent (a person) from coming into possession of a property or right which in the ordinary course would devolve upon him as heir.

Esteem (19): to value something or someone.

Inherit: to take or receive (property, *esp.* real property, or a right, privilege, rank, or title) as the heir of the former possessor (usually an ancestor), at his decease; to get, or come into possession of, by legal descent or succession.

Impropriety (35): incorrect behaviour.

Libertine (21): a person who follows his or her own inclinations; one who is not restricted by convention or tradition.

Norland: the estate and manor house of the Dashwood family.

Parish (25): a large area of land under the parsonage or supervision of a minister/rector.

Pound: the official currency of the United Kingdom and its territories.

Pray (57): used to add urgency to a request; 'I pray you be calm'.

Propriety: correct behaviour.

Rector (78): a member of the clergy who has charge of a parish

Scandal (62): damage to reputation; rumour or general comment injurious to reputation.

Sense: that which is wise, reasonable, or sensible; good judgement, wisdom, or prudence.

Sensibility: sensitivity, sympathy, or emotionality.

Society (58): the aggregate of fashionable, wealthy, or otherwise prominent people regarded as forming a distinct class or body in a community.

Ward (62): guardianship of a child, a minor, or other person legally incapable of conducting his affairs. Also, the condition of being subject to a guardian.

Who Was Jane Austen? — Her life and works

Early Life: Jane Austen was born on December 16th, 1775, in Hampshire, England. Out of eight children, she was the seventh child of Rev. George and Cassandra Austen. Her father was a **rector** for the **parish** of Steventon. Austen's family was reportedly "lively and affectionate," with an appreciation for both education and amusement. She had six brothers and one sister, and her sister Cassandra is known to have been Austen's best friend throughout her life. Austen attended several schools between 1783 and 1786, and then continued her education at home under the supervision of her father. In 1801, Austen moved to Bath, England with her family where they lived until the death of her father in 1805. Austen, her sister Cassandra, and her mother lived in several towns before finding their long-term home in the town of Chawton.



Austen's Writing: Jane Austen is commonly hailed as "Britain's best-known and most loved female author." She has six notable published novels, and many other works that are still widely available and revered. As early as 1787 (at only 12 years-old), Jane Austen began writing. Austen spent her life in fashionable society, and it is said that her involvement in this society provided her with inspiration for her plot lines and characters.

Writing timeline:

c. 1787-1794: Short works, collectively called the *Juvenilia*, written; *Lady Susan* written, but without a conclusion.

c. 1795: "Elinor and Marianne" written (later revised as *Sense and Sensibility*).

1796: "First Impressions" begun (later revised as *Pride and Prejudice*).

1797: "First Impressions" completed (rejected by publisher)

c. 1798-1799: "Susan" written (later retitled "Catherine" and posthumously published as *Northanger Abbey*).

1803: "Susan" sold to a publisher, but never published.

c. 1804: *The Watsons* begun but not finished.

1805: *Lady Susan* completed.

1810: *Sense and Sensibility* accepted for publication.

1811: *Sense and Sensibility* published. (**Austen's first published work!**); Revision of "First Impressions" as *Pride and Prejudice* begun; *Mansfield Park* begun.

1812: *Pride and Prejudice* purchased by publisher.

1813: *Pride and Prejudice* published; *Mansfield Park* completed and accepted for publication.

1814: *Mansfield Park* published. *Emma* begun.

1815: *Emma* completed and published; *Persuasion* begun.

1816: *Persuasion* completed; "Susan" repurchased from publisher and revised as "Catherine"

1817: *Sanditon* begun but not finished; *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* published together after her passing.

Illness and Death: In 1816, Jane Austen became ill with what is now thought to have been Addison Disease. In her final years, she continued to write, but the novel *Sanditon* was left unfinished due to her failing health. She eventually moved to Winchester to receive medical supervision but succumbed to her illness at 41 years of age on July 18th, 1817. She is buried in Winchester Cathedral.



Fun Facts about Jane Austen:

- She played the piano.
- She was proposed to by a family friend, said yes, and then changed her mind the next day.
- Despite her many marriage plots, she was never married.
- She lived during the time of the American Revolution and the French Revolution.
- She was writing at the same time as the famous composers Mozart and Haydn.
- Her first four novels were published anonymously, and their true author was not revealed until after she died.
- During her lifetime and few years following her death, other prolific contributors to literature were Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth, William Wordsworth, Lord Byron, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, Mary Shelley, Percy Shelley, and Sir Walter Scott.

A What's What and Who's Who of Kate Hamill's adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*.

Synopsis: The Dashwood family is a well-off English family living in the manor house of [Norland Park](#). After the death of Mr. Henry Dashwood, the patriarch of the family, his home and fortune are left to his only son, Mr. John Dashwood. Henry's last request for his wife and three daughters to be financially cared for by his son is ignored, and the Dashwood women are forced to leave the life and home they have known all their lives. Elinor, the oldest Dashwood sister, is desperately in love with a family friend, Edward Ferrars, but she is too reserved to make her feelings known. Marianne, the middle Dashwood daughter, is desperately in love with a man she barely knows, John Willoughby, but she shows her feelings too soon. Elinor's reservation and Marianne's boldness cause the women problems as they navigate their new lives and the realities of 18th century [society](#). They make new friends, new enemies, and learn that the path to marriage is rarely easy.

The Dashwood Family and connections:

Mrs. Dashwood: Widow; mother to the Dashwood sisters.

Elinor Dashwood: The eldest Dashwood sister; has good [sense](#), is reserved, and wise.

Marianne Dashwood: The middle Dashwood sister; emotional, sensitive, shows [sensibility](#).

Margaret Dashwood: The youngest Dashwood sister; smart, funny, troublemaker.

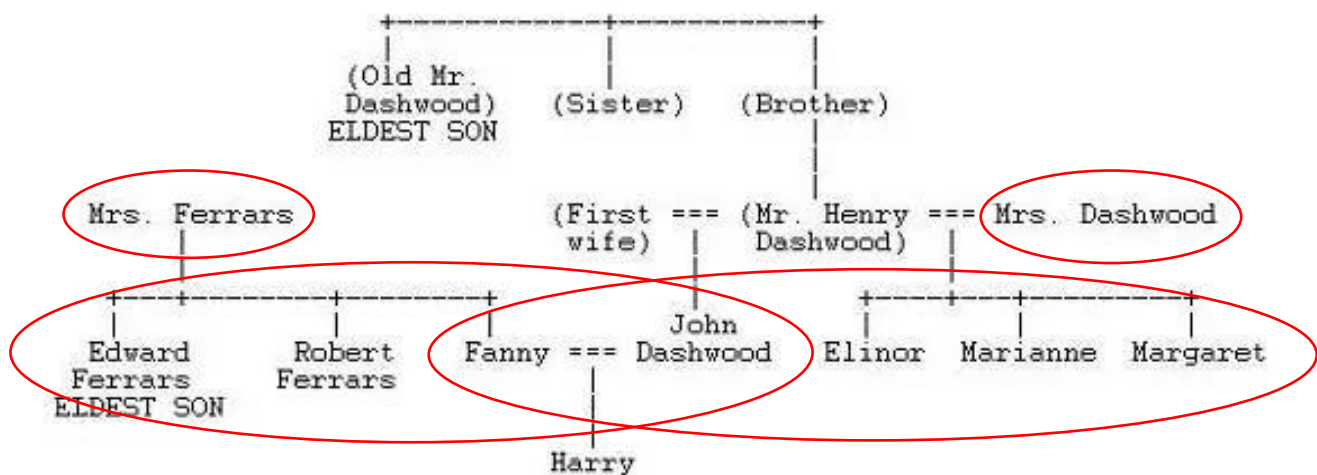
John Dashwood: The first child of Mrs. Dashwood's husband (from a previous marriage); heir of [Norland Estate](#).

Fanny (Ferrars) Dashwood: Wife of John Dashwood; selfish and manipulative; nasty.

Edward Ferrars: Eldest brother of Fanny Dashwood, friend of the Dashwood sisters; kind and reserved bachelor.

Robert Ferrars: Middle brother of the Ferrars family; a callow young man.

Mrs. Ferrars: Mother of Edward, Robert, and Fanny; stern and domineering.



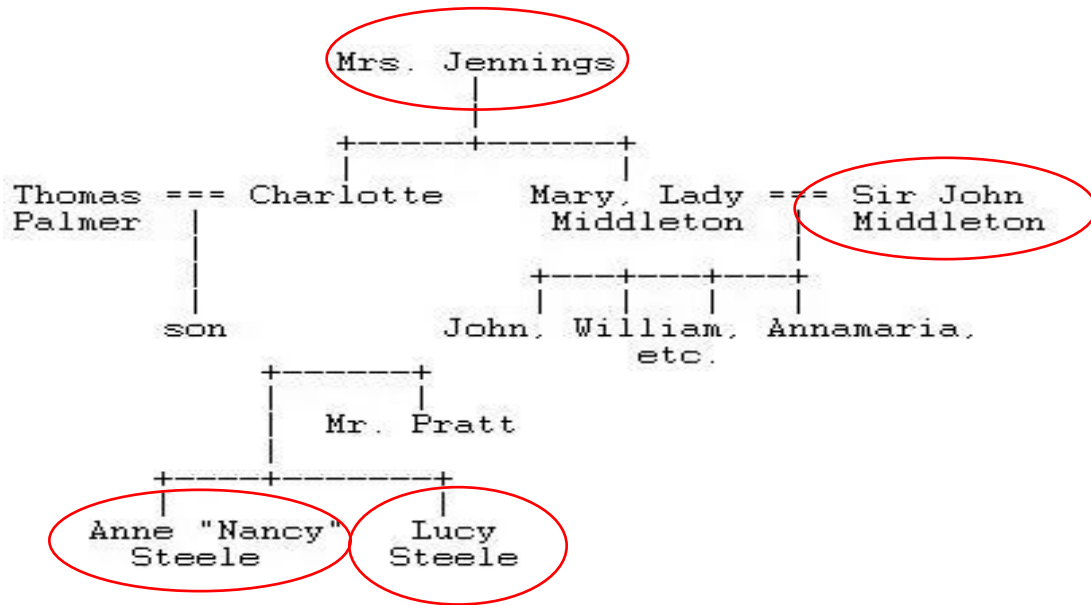
The Middleton Family and connections:

Sir John Middleton: Owner of [Barton Park](#), cousin of Mrs. Dashwood.

Mrs. Jennings: Mother-in-law of Sir John Middleton, resides with Sir John and his wife Mary, a terror to the countryside.

Lucy Steele: Cousin of Mrs. Jennings, a young girl of no fortune.

Anne Steele: Lucy's older sister, indiscreet.

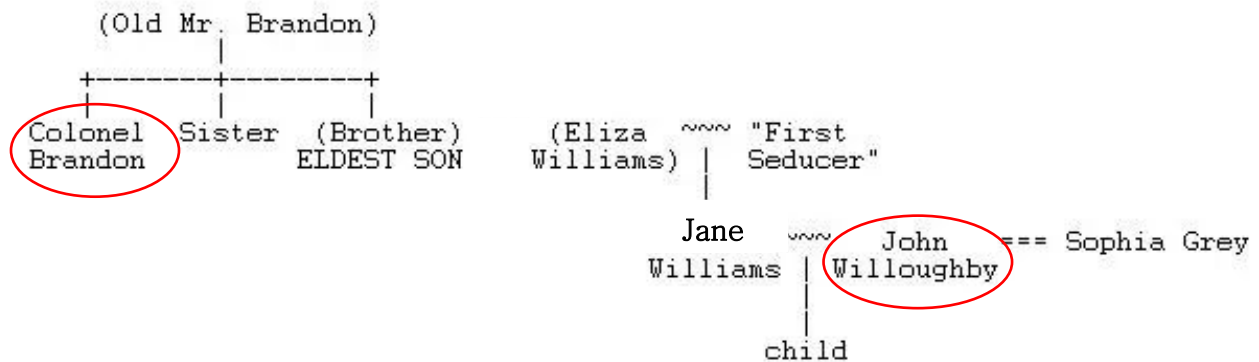


The Brandon Family and Connections:

Colonel Brandon: Friend of the Middletons, an older bachelor.

Eliza Williams: (not on stage but referred to) An old love interest of Colonel Brandon. It did not work out between them, but after Eliza's death Colonel Brandon cares for Eliza's child, Jane.

John Willoughby: a handsome bachelor who assists Marianne when she hurts her ankle, charming, but deceitful.



What's the problem? — The Dashwood women as victims of entailment.

When reading an Austen novel or interacting with content set in the late 1700s/1800s, a common problem written into the story is the issue of strict inheritance rules. In the time when *Sense and Sensibility* takes place, the law was very different than it is today. There were specific guidelines to follow (both social and legal) in regard to leaving money behind to a family member. While the English law did not



require that an inheritance or estate be left to the oldest male of the family, this requirement was often written into the rules of the estate by the family. The name of this part of the law was “entailment” law.

“Entail” word description: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkpKMrqTDkk> (general and legal)

Rules of entailment at the time: <https://janeaustensworld.com/category/upper-class/page/2/> “The need to keep country estates intact and perpetuate a family’s power was so important that the eldest son inherited everything – the estate, title, all the houses, jewels, furnishings, and art.”

Entailment in Jane Austen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPFeB2bOO-0> . While this video is primarily focused on *Pride and Prejudice*, the maker of this video provides a clear description of an entailment specifically focused on Jane Austen’s novels and provides several examples from *Sense and Sensibility*.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, when Henry Dashwood, the father of the Dashwood family, dies, his son John Dashwood is bequeathed the entailment of the estate and the Dashwood money. Though he promises to provide for his stepmother and half-sisters, there is nothing in writing to legally ensure John gives them anything. Entailment rules could rarely be challenged, especially if there was a capable, living heir whose name was on the entail. This leaves John and Fanny Dashwood free to decide what “providing” for the Dashwood women means. Due to John and Fanny Dashwood’s greed, Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters are left to basically fend for themselves. This is the main problem for the Dashwoods, and though hard to comprehend in present day, it is fundamental to understand how dependant females were in Austen’s time.

A Society of Marriage – “Happiness in marriage is entirely a matter of chance.” – Jane Austen



It seems all anyone talks about in *Sense and Sensibility* is marriage, proposals, and weddings. One might think, “What’s the big deal? Can’t they just be content as single people and move on with their lives?” The answer is not quite as simple as it might seem. For the upper-class citizens of Austen’s time, marriage was largely a social and economic arrangement between two families to secure wealth and position, and the implications of single life were much different for women than for men. Watch the following videos for background information on Jane Austen and the concept of marriage.

Austen and Marriage: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLts5IRmm4>

Proposals and Marriage in Austen: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1SzUVvH2hU>

Though the importance of marriage is at the forefront of Jane Austen’s novels, she also takes the time to weave in elements of romance. Jane Austen said herself, “*I consider everybody as having a right to marry once in their lives for love, if they can.*” (27 December 1808). While this opinion ensures her plot lines are intriguing and satisfying, the importance of marriage cannot be forgotten, and Austen herself acknowledges that love in a marriage is not something that occurs in every courtship.

Discussion Questions:

1. Does the necessity of marriage in this time period cancel out the romance Austen writes into her stories?
2. In your opinion, has marriage fully changed from a social/economic pairing to a pairing only founded in love by 2023? Does this apply for everywhere in the world?

Money Matters – “Money determines more than you might wish, Marianne.” -Elinor Dashwood

Sometimes, when reading or watching content from the last 18th/early 19th century, we may wonder why there is so much emphasis on how much money per year some of the characters receive, or the amount some of the women have to their name when they marry someone. Why was this?

- Nobility (landowners) had higher standards of living, and getting a job was not an option for eligible bachelors if they wanted to be desired as a husband for wealthy daughters. It was important for the bachelors to have large financial support to attract equally (or more) wealthy single women.
- The wealth of a family was information everyone in **society** was aware of. Here is a great video explaining the importance of money in Jane Austen’s **society**:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Muf0o3PZGQw>
- As time passes, the value of money ebbs and flows, so it may be difficult to truly understand how much money these characters had. Below is a chart of the translation from British **pounds** into dollars, including what the amounts would be worth in 2022’s Canadian Dollar.

Character	£ per year in 1810	\$ CAD per year in 2022
John Dashwood	6,000	1,378,260.58
John Willoughby (thanks to Miss Grey)	3,100	712,101.29
Mrs. Dashwoods and her daughters combined (pre marriage)	500	114,855.04
Edward and Elinor (after marriage)	850	195,253.58
Colonel Brandon	2,000	459,420.19

Manor vs. Cottage — Set possibilities

One of the first plot points in *Sense and Sensibility* is the relocation of the Dashwoods from [Norland Park](#) to [Barton Cottage](#). The Dashwood women have been living a life of luxury, and the relocation has a tremendous emotional effect on the family. The differences in size and style between the two houses would have been substantial, and the general extravagance of the manor house is contrasted by the small, simple nature of the cottage. Examples of manor houses in comparison to cottages are shown here:

Manor Houses:



Cottages:



Even before looking at the inside, there is an obvious difference in status between these buildings. The links below provide examples of how the PBS film showed the differences between [Norland Park](#), the Dashwood's manor house, and [Barton Cottage](#) where the move following their father's death. In film, this contrast is easy to show, with options for manor and cottage sets being nearly without limits.

Here is an example of what the inside of Norland looked like in the PBS version of *Sense and Sensibility*. Pay close attention to the atmosphere of Norland, the walls, the doors, any detail that communicates the beautiful nature of the manor house.

Dinner at Norland: <https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/mast13.ela.lit.ssdinner/sense-and-sensibility-1-dinner-at-norland-park/>

And here is an example of how PBS represented Barton Cottage:

<https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/mast13.ela.lit.sscottage/sense-and-sensibility-2-barton-cottage/>

Establishing a set for a film adaptation is much different than creating a set design for a stage production, yet it is still important to show the extreme differences of lifestyle for the Dashwoods before and after their relocation.

Discussion questions:

1. What is the first thing you notice when looking at the set differences in the examples in film?
2. How did the director choose to emphasize the differences between Norland Park and Barton Cottage?
3. How might these differences be translated to the stage?

Activity:

Imagine you are a set designer for the Saint John Theatre Company's production of *Sense and Sensibility*, and you are assigned with designing the set for the scenes in Norland Park and Barton Cottage.

1. Draft a list noting set choices you would make for both Norland Park and Barton Cottage. What colours would you choose for the walls? Do those colours signify anything specific? Would you include different styles of furniture? Include four to five choices for each location and explain your reasoning behind each choice in a short paragraph.
2. Create a vision board (can be hand drawn or in a collage form using photos from Google) for both Norland Park and Barton Cottage to show a visual representation of your choices.

Example:

1. Norland Park Choices:

- Dark red walls in the sitting room
- Large painting on one of the walls with gold frame
- Dark Brown wooden furniture (shiny and ornate)
- Flowers in vase
- Dark lighting

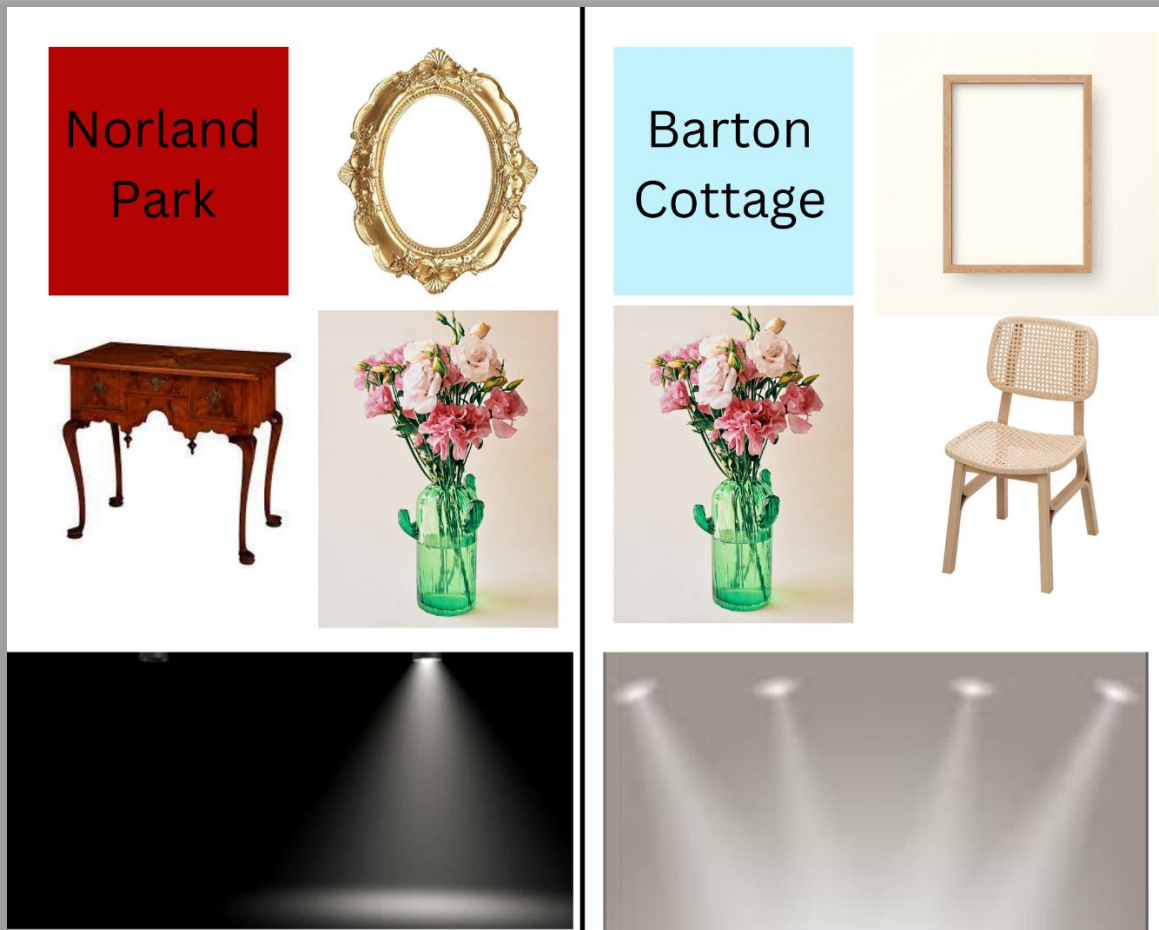
Barton Cottage Choices:

- Light blue walls or light floral wallpaper
- Small hand-drawn pictures on the walls in small frames
- Simple wooden furniture
- Flowers in vase
- Bright lighting

Example Paragraph: "The choices I made for the Norland and Barton sets are meant to show a grand contrast between the two locations. The set for Norland will communicate wealth at every

opportunity, including the red walls, the shiny furniture, and the large gold painting. In the script, Elinor's paintings are the subject of conversation at Norland Park after the Dashwood women move out. I wanted the painting to look as if it is something Elinor created, such as a landscape or a still-life painting. The dark lighting will be used to set a mood of melancholy, because when the Dashwood women are shown at Norland on stage, they are times of turmoil, sadness, and drama. At Barton Cottage, I want the mood to be lighter and happier. The walls and lighting will be warm and bright, meant to communicate the opportunities available to the Dashwood women in their new life. Elinor's grander paintings stay at Norland, but I want there to be smaller paintings on the walls of Barton Cottage to show that there were some small paintings the women were able to keep. The flowers in the vase in both the Norland and Barton sets are meant to be the common element connecting Norland and Barton. They will be a symbol of the relocation of the Dashwood women, as the flowers will only appear in the Norland set while the Dashwood women are still living there."

2. Example vision board collage



From Page to Stage – Adapting Austen

Adapting a novel into a play is not as easy as it might seem. Novels often have pages of text describing a situation that can only be communicated on stage through *dialogue* (a conversation between two or more actors) or *stage directions* (notes in the script that tell the actors if specific body language or positioning is required). Sometimes, an important scene in a novel does not have dialogue, but when translating it to a play it needs dialogue or stage directions added so that the audience still knows what is going on. Another common roadblock in adapting a novel is that sometimes there IS dialogue in a novel scene, but it is too long to include all of it in a script. Adaptation of a novel or text to a play format requires that the author writing the adaptation consider a specific set of questions:

1. Have I made the scene short enough?
2. Does it still make sense?
3. Am I including information that may not be important for the scene to make sense, but is important for a later scene?

Consider the following adaptation from Kate Hamill of the scene where Marianne meets John Willoughby:

The novel by Jane Austen reads:

The whole country abounded in beautiful walks. The high downs, which invited them from almost every window of the cottage to seek the exquisite enjoyment of air on their summits, were a happy alternative when the dirt of the valleys beneath shut up their superior beauties; and toward one of these hills did Marianne and Margaret one memorable morning direct their steps, attracted by the partial sunshine of a showery sky, and unable longer to bear the confinement which the settled rain of the two preceding days had occasioned. The weather was not tempting enough to draw the two others from their pencil and their book, in spite of Marianne's declaration that the day would be lastingly fair, and that every threatening cloud would be drawn off from their hills; and the two girls set off together.

They gaily ascended the down, rejoicing in their own penetration at every glimpse of blue sky; and when they caught in their faces the animating gales of a high southwesterly wind, they pitied the fears which had prevented their mother and Elinor from sharing such delightful sensations.

'Is there a felicity in the world,' said Marianne, 'superior to this? – Margret, we will walk here at least two hours.'

Margaret agreed, and they pursued their way against the wind, resisting it with laughing delight for about twenty minutes longer, when suddenly the clouds united over their heads, and a driving rain set full in their face. Chagrined and surprised, they were obliged, though unwillingly, to turn back, for no shelter was nearer than their own house. One consolation, however, remained for them, to which the exigence of the moment gave more than usual propriety, -- it was that of running with all possible speed down the steep side of the hill which led immediately to their garden gate.

They set off. Marianne had first advantage, but a false step brought her suddenly to the ground; and Margaret, unable to stop herself to assist her, was involuntarily hurried along, and reached the bottom in safety.

A gentleman carrying a gun, with two pointers playing round him, was passing up the hill, and within a few yards of Marianne, when her accident happened. He put down his gun and ran to her assistance. She had raised herself from the ground, but her foot had been twisted in her fall, and she was scarcely

able to stand. The gentleman offered his services; and perceiving that her modesty declined what her situation rendered necessary, took her up in his arms, without farther delay, and carried her down the hill. Then passing through the garden, the gate of which had been left open by Margaret, he bore her directly into the house, whither Margaret was just arrived, and quitted not his hold till he had seated her in a chair in the parlour.

The play adaptation by Kate Hamill reads:

MARIANNE. Margaret, will you go and get your boots on?

MARGARET. We're not still going for a walk, are we? It is goiiiiiiing to raiiiiiin!

MARIANNE. No, it is not. Now go and get your boots, please.

...

ELINOR. Are you still walking? It looks as though it is going to rain.

MARGARET. Mariaaaaaane!

MARIANNE. All this talk of a wet spring! It is NOT GOING TO RAIN, the day will be everlastingly fair. NOW COME ALONG!

They exit, Margaret dragging her feet.

Some time passes – pouring rain is heard. Elinor and Mrs. Dashwood sit and sew.

ELINOR. A very wet spring. We should tell Betsy to put on tea – they will be soaked through.

MARGARET. (*Runs in, breathless.*) Elinor! Mamma! Marianne fell! And hurt her ankle! And a gentleman! Grabbed her right up!

MRS. DASHWOOD. Margaret, what on earth –

MARGARET. (*Excitedly pointing.*) Marianne's preserver! Marianne's preserver!

Willoughby enters, carrying Marianne, who is deeply embarrassed by his hands on her – she can't even look at him. He is uncommonly handsome, a classic Romantic hero.

Class or Small Group Activity:

1. Examine the two versions of the text in comparison to one another.
2. Highlight the sections of the novel that Kate Hamill included in her adaptation

Discussion Questions:

1. In your opinion, did Kate Hamill include all the important information from the novel passage in the scene of her play?
2. If you believe there are important details that should have been included (either in dialogue or in the stage directions), what are they?

The Gossips – Examining the functions of a chorus



In Kate Hamill’s adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*, there is a group of characters called “The Gossips.” While each of the gossips have their own lines, they together are a “chorus of high [society](#) creatures” and represent the collective voice of the highest classes of Jane Austen’s time (Hamill).

The notion of a chorus in theatre had its origins in classical Greek drama as early as 6 BCE! Groups of singers and dancers played a collective role and often served three important purposes:

1. **Commenting on events happening in the play** (Haamer 2022).

This commentary is especially helpful when the play is an adaptation of a novel. There are often events that the audience need to be made aware of, but these events do not get a scene of their own.

Textual Examples:

- “Poor Mr. Dashwood! And poor *Mrs.* Dashwood, in every sense of the word! You know that his widow and daughters are left with almost nothing!” (Hamill 11)
- “No, no. Mr. Dashwood could not *legally* [bequeath](#) [[Norland](#)] to the ladies.” (11)
- “His rich wife – not a sympathetic creature! Moved into [Norland Park](#) the DAY AFTER THE FUNERAL, without a word of notice to the new widow!” (11)
- “I suppose you heard about Mr. Willoughby’s very...expeditious nuptials?” (63)
- “A fever, they say, and very serious.” (81)
- “They say the doctor has been there four times in two days, and the Palmers have removed themselves, lest it be contagious.” (81)

Commentary can also be used so the audience can gauge how the events would have been received by **society** as a whole.

Textual Examples:

- “But when he **inherits** from her, they will be wealthy indeed! Wealthy and handsome – what more could one wish?” (32)
- “GOSSIP 1: I heard that [Marianne] went out riding with him, alone. GOSSIP 4: I am not surprised! GOSSIP 2: I am sure all of the Dashwood girls run quite wild – ” (63)
- “Poor girl! Silly Girl! Very forward! Very foolish! What a waste!” (63)

2. **Setting the atmosphere for the audience** (Haamer 2022).

Many theatrical devices can be used to set atmosphere, but using a chorus to create shifts in mood represents more than just the mood of a single character; it represents the mood of an entire population at a given time.

Textual Examples:

- “Why such secrecy?” (39)
- “Shocking! Appalling! Absurd!” (76)

3. **Preparing the audience for big moments** (Haamer 2022).

Authors, playwrights, and screenwriters want their audience, whether that be their readers or viewers, to *feel* something as their stories unfold. If there is significant build up or excitement shown by the chorus regarding an upcoming event, the audience will mirror these feelings. When the anticipated event finally happens, the emotional impact will be much greater.

Textual Examples:

- “No news of an engagement yet? . . .I cannot think why – he uses her **Christian name** quite openly.” (38)
- “A party! A party! A party, party, party!!” (66)
- “How does he propose to marry ANYONE now that he’s penniless?” (77)

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you feel that the chorus of The Gossips are a reliable source of information? Why or why not?
2. In your opinion, are The Gossips simply representative of Jane Austen’s society, or are there echoes of their characters in today’s society as well?
3. If The Gossips had not been added to the script, would this change the mood of the play? How so?

Sense vs. Sensibility – An examination of Elinor and Marianne Dashwood

When examining a text, the first piece of information the reader receives is the title. The title *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen reveals that two character traits are going to be placed in opposition to one another. “**Sense**” is often defined as “that which is wise, reasonable, or sensible; good judgement, wisdom, or prudence,” while “**sensibility**” is defined as “sensitivity, sympathy, or emotionality.”

The two oldest Dashwood sisters, Elinor and Marianne, are shown to be extremely different characters in *Sense and Sensibility*, and their personalities shape their reactions to events, their emotional responses, and their ways of seeing the world. Below are quotations from Elinor and Marianne.

Elinor:

“I do not deny that I think very highly of Edward. That I greatly esteem him. That I like him.” (19)
“It will fit all of us comfortably, and Thomas and Betsy. We are really very fortunate, dear.” (22)
“Please do excuse my sister’s...enthusiasm.” (25)
“He is very civil. He has seen a great deal of the world, and always answers my inquiries with good breeding and good nature.” (33)
“My protégé, as you call him, is a sensible man, and sense will always have attractions for me.” (33)

“She would benefit from a more mature understanding of certain realities.” (34)
“Mamma, I do not think this is prudent.” (53)
“What good does it do to become hysterical?!” (59)
“I was glad to spare my loved ones from my unhappiness.” (74)
“My current composure is the product of my constant and painful exertion to maintain control over myself.” (75)
“I WILL be calm; I WILL be mistress of myself.” (90)

Marianne:

“With spirit, Edward!” (16)
“That means it is only a matter of time...before he binds his soul to yours, forever!” (20)
“Colonel Brandon is old enough to be my father, and if he was ever animated enough to be in love, has long outlived the sensation.” (26)
“I may not have been acquainted with Willoughby for long, Elinor – but I know him better than I know any other creature in the world!” (35)
“Edward! Oh, Edward! Good God, what on earth could have taken you so long?!” (42)

“I assure you it would be almost the greatest happiness I could ever think of!” (53)
“Neither of us has anything to tell; you, because you do not communicate, and I, because I conceal nothing.” (55)
“Leave me, hate me, forget me! But do not ask me not to feel!” (59)
“Mine is a misery which nothing can ever do away.” (65)
“I will go mad if I do not walk, Elinor.” (80)

Discussion Questions:

1. After reading these quotations, which sister do you think represent “sense”, and which sister represents “sensibility?”
2. What do you predict will be the outcome of these strong character traits in Elinor and Marianne?
3. In your opinion, is sense always better than sensibility, or vice versa? A combination of both?

Fancy Fanny and Elegant Elinor – Costume Comparison

An essential element of any stage production is costumes. For the duration of a play, the actors not only behave like someone else, but they also look like someone else. Costumes can transport the audience to another time, or even alternate realities, and can serve to tell a story more deeply than just looking like someone else.

Elements that impact the messages sent by a costume can include, but are not limited to:

- **Colour:** colours often have symbolic meanings behind them and evoke a specific mood. *Further reading on colour:* <https://www.smashingmagazine.com/2010/01/color-theory-for-designers-part-1-the-meaning-of-color/>
- **Shape:** clothing well suited for an actor's body type will create a flattering perception (or the opposite).
- **Style:** The appearance of certain fabrics or styles can show status and fashion sense
- **Props:** Props can add an extra element of characterization where clothing cannot

Choices made by a director or costume designer when assembling a costume can be symbolic, used to ensure the audience feels a certain way when they see the character, or can be simple, allowing for the audience to make their own judgements about what a character is like. Another consideration of a costume designer is how two costumes can be used to show contrasting traits between two characters (Hishon, Theatre Folk).

There are not two characters in *Sense and Sensibility* more different than Elinor Dashwood and her sister-in-law Fanny. Elinor is kind, affectionate, generous, and caring, shown by the responsibility she takes in caring for her mother and sisters, her gentle nature in dealing with Lucy Steele, and her desire to avoid inconveniencing anyone with her feelings. Fanny, on the other hand, is selfish, greedy, and uncharitable, always thinking of money and the wealth of her family.

Here are examples of how Elinor and Fanny have been portrayed:

Elinor:



Fanny:



Activity: (can be used as an individual assignment or as a small group activity)

1. Make a list of important character traits for both Elinor and Fanny (3-5 traits)
 - a. (modification: the class could be split in half, one group assigned to finding traits for Elinor and the other finding traits for Fanny.)
2. Design a costume for each character using colour, shape, style, or props to represent the traits identified for Elinor and Fanny. The choices can be simple or elaborate but ensure that you have made one choice per trait identified and explain your choice in 1-2 sentences.
 - a. (modification: the students can design a costume for their assigned character with the three traits in mind, and as long as they can explain their choices can move on to step 3.)
3. Visually represent your costumes by creating a collage, a vision board, or by drawing a picture clearly showing your choices.
 - a. (modification: students can choose three reference photos from Google and place them in a document or online presentation.)

Discussion Question:

1. Are there other pairs of characters who could be paired for comparison? Who would they be?

The Miss Steeles – Characters Creating Tension

There are specific types of characters authors create to achieve balance in their stories. There are often characters who are likeable and trustworthy, characters who are likeable but foolish, complex characters, and characters who are simply used to fill in gaps. Finally, there are characters who are



absolutely despised by the audience. These characters fulfill the villain role or are used to create problems of some kind for the likeable protagonists. Without characters to dislike, the story would not be nearly as interesting!

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Jane Austen creates a wonderful balance between characters that are likeable and those who are not. Fanny Dashwood is clearly one of the dislikeable characters in the text, with her selfishness and greed creating problems for the likeable Dashwood sisters. Sometimes, there are characters who are unlikable, though the reasons why they are unlikable are more subtle than the obvious undesirable character traits.

Anne and Lucy Steele are two of these characters. As the story develops, the dislike for them grows, and the transition of these characters from “relations of Mrs. Jennings” into despicable villains happens quickly and without ceremony. Let’s look at why this might be.

Quotations from Anne Steele:

- “I suppose you were very sorry to leave Sussex, and that big fine house...When your father died, and you lost all your money.” (48)
- “Lord knows if I can tell what beaux there might be about Norland! And perhaps the Miss Dashwoods might find it dull here if they do not have so many as they used to have...I suppose your brother was quite a beau, Miss Dashwood, before he married, as he was so rich...” (48)

Anne Steele’s first lines immediately create tension between the Steeles and the Dashwoods. While she does not say anything outwardly cruel, her rude and bold manner makes the audience feel uncomfortable. The audience will now feel uncomfortable whenever Anne Steele is on stage because she now has a reputation for speaking her mind despite the inappropriate nature of her thoughts.

Quotations from Lucy Steele:

- "What a lovely room this is! So very well appointed." (48)
- "Anne! We have met Mr. Ferrars once or twice at our uncle's, but we hardly know him well." (48)
- "I could not bear to have you think me impertinent. I would rather anything in the world than be thought impertinent by a person like you." (49)

So far, Lucy Steele is showing much more **propriety** than her sister, and she does her best to be polite despite her being lower class than the Dashwoods.

- "I am engaged (*fixing her eyes upon Elinor*) to his eldest brother. I dare say he never dropped the smallest hint of it to you or your family? It is a great secret..." (50).
- "I assure you, I am not mistaken about the name of the man on whom all my happiness depends. Mister. Edward. Ferrars." (50)

Lucy is now delving into villain territory, with initial politeness turning into a determination to make her claim to Edward known. It is not yet totally apparent that Lucy is aware of Elinor's feelings for Edward, but this quickly changes.

- "Oh no – did you think him sadly out of spirits? Poor Edward; it does break his heart terribly, for us to be separated. I gave him a lock of my hair set in a ring, and that was some comfort, he said, but not equal to us being together." (51)
- "Miss Dashwood, I hope we can speak of this again. It is such a relief to confide in someone so much *older* and wiser!" (51)
- "[Edward] has told me so much about you and your family, and I know that he looks upon you quite as his own *sister*." (52)

After these lines, Lucy has officially shown the audience that her intention in this conversation is to boast of her engagement, while putting Elinor in a place of silence and submission. Lucy remains in this position of power, and her further interactions with Elinor continue to boast of her engagement with Edward.

- "Miss Dashwood! (*Turning to Elinor and squeezing her hand.*) Pray for me! In a moment I shall meet the person that is to be my mother!" (67)
- "Perhaps, Miss Marianne, you think that young men never keep any engagements at all!" (72)
- "I am afraid I must also be on my way. If you are leaving, Mr. Ferrars, perhaps you would be so good as to escort me as far as the park?"

Lucy Steele and her lines are evidence that sometimes the villain can operate in a subtle, deceitful way under the guise of polite innocence.

I'm Not a Gossip! – Writing Activity

Shock! Gasp! **Scandal** has fallen upon the Ferrars household! In a time before cell phones and Snapchat ruled the waves of communication, scandal and gossip still managed to work its way around a community (whether that gossip contained the whole truth or not was another matter). News often spread by word of mouth or by letter.

When Anne Steele reveals to Fanny that Lucy Steele and Edward Ferrars have been secretly engaged, Mrs. Jennings cannot wait to spread the news to the Dashwoods and other acquaintances. Her son-in-law, Sir John Middleton, is also a fan of being 'in-the-know', and she is particularly excited to share the news with him. The problem is, he is in the country at **Barton Park** and Mrs. Jennings is in London, so she must send a letter to him as soon as possible.

Imagine that you are Mrs. Jennings writing a letter to Sir John. You have just heard the details of how Anne revealed the secret information. You want to make sure you are including the proper information because you are NOT a gossip, you are simply relaying the story so that everyone has the correct information.

Activity:

1. Closely read the excerpt of the play where the details of the scandal are outlined (provided below).
2. Write a letter to Sir John detailing the whole story to the best of your ability. Include at least FIVE textual details of the story in your letter (characters involved, the location of events, other textual locations you may know of, etc).
3. Be as creative as you like in your writing but ensure the details of the scandal are correct (remember, you are not a gossip).
4. Create an artistic representation of your letter. You can hand write your letter on a piece of worn paper, make a creative word document, the choice is yours.

Play Excerpt:

MRS. JENNINGS. Miss Dashwood! Miss Marianne! Have you heard the news? At your sister's house! A scandal! (*With great enthusiasm.*) A real scandal!

Fanny sits, doing needlework. Anne sits with her desultorily doing the same.

ANNE. I cannot think what is taking Lucy so long at her toilette this morning. She must fix a ribbon in her hair too, I suppose, after seeing mine. (*Patting her own hair.*)

FANNY. *Cette ribbon* suits you marvelously, my dear. *Très jolie.* (*Off of Anne's of complete incomprehension.*) Very pretty.

ANNE. Oh, now, YOU are going to laugh at me, too. But why shouldn't I wear pink ribbons? Pink is the doctor's favourite colour, true, but that doesn't mean that I wear it just to please him!

FANNY. You young ladies and your **beaux**! It is all so diverting.

ANNE. (*Simpering.*) Oh, la.

FANNY. But you must not keep every heart for yourself, Miss Anne! You must leave some suitors for dear Miss Lucy.

ANNE. Oh, Lucy gets more than enough attention, ma'am.

FANNY. **Pray** tell!

ANNE. Lucy has a **beau** herself, though not a soul knows of it but me. I have a vast deal I could say to you on that account, were I so free.

FANNY. Now, Miss Anne! You know Miss Lucy and yourself are family to me – and I am afraid that we permit no secrets in this family. I will ask you again, Madame – who is the lucky gentleman, and where is his lodging?

ANNE. Oh no, I mustn't tell, ma'am. (*Desperately attempting to change the subject.*) My, if you aren't wearing that new spotted muslin...

FANNY. No, no...I shall not be put off so easily!

ANNE. Lord! Well...you are so fond of Lucy, I'm sure there will be no difficulty. But you mustn't tell her that I told you! She is engaged ma'am!

LUCY. (*From offstage.*) Anne!

FANNY. Engaged!

ANNE. To –

Anne whispers it in her ear. Fanny looks at her and starts screaming hysterically. She throws the needlework at Anne. Anne begins to scream. Lucy runs in; Fanny lunges toward her. Lucy starts screaming. John Dashwood runs in and restrains Fanny, as does a maid. Lucy slaps Anne.

Hysteria. Lucy faints. Anne is crawling about on her knees, crying, etc.

MRS. JENNINGS. Your sister-in-law threw them out of the house and fell into fits, and your brother was so frightened that he sent for Dr. Donovan, and Dr. Donovan found the house in an uproar, and now the story is ALL OVER TOWN. Myself, I had no notion of people's making such a to-do about money and greatness! (Hamill 73-74)

Example assignment letter:

Dear John,

I trust you are in good health, and all is well at Barton Park. I am writing to relay a scandal of the grandest proportions. I was walking down the road on my way to the shops when I ran into Dr. Donovan, who had the most remarkable story to tell. Apparently, the young Anne Steele was sitting in the parlour room of John and Fanny Dashwood's town house. The story goes, the Miss Steele and Fanny were working on their needlework and making idle conversation about beaux, when Fanny told Anne that Anne ought to save some beaux attention for Lucy. Anne then told Fanny that Lucy already HAD a beau! Imagine that! Obviously, Fanny's curiosity was peaked and pressed Anne for more information. After much convincing, Anne finally revealed that LUCY is ENGAGED to Mr. EDWARD FERRARS! Naturally Fanny was in such a state of hysteria that she threw the Steeles out of the house and cried and screamed without end. It is due to Fanny's upset that Dr. Donovan was sent for, and the whole of the situation was revealed to him. I myself am in a state of utter shock and have sorrow in my heart about how Fanny treated the Miss Steeles, however deserving they may be of the repercussions of this situation. If you pass this information along, please ensure the details of the story are correct, because I am not a gossip, just a messenger of information. All the best to you and the family.

Mrs. Jennings

Poor Willoughby? – Debate Activity

Be it resolved that the audience should feel sympathy for John Willoughby at the end of *Sense and Sensibility*.

I know what you're thinking...How could anyone EVER argue that the audience should feel sympathy for John Willoughby. He broke Marianne's heart, and he showed great **impropriety** with Colonel Brandon's **ward**. What is there to debate?

In an organized debate, there are two positions to be held for the statement being argued:

Affirmative: In a debate, the affirmative side uses textual evidence to support that the resolution is true. In this case, the 'pro' side will find evidence to support the point, "Yes, the audience should feel sympathy for John Willoughby"

Opposition: The opposing side must use textual evidence to support that the resolution is false. In this case, the 'con' side will find evidence to support the point, "No, the audience should NOT feel sympathy for John Willoughby."

When engaging in a debate, the point is not whether you personally agree with the statement or not. The point is to find textual evidence to support a point whether you believe it or not. This helps us recognize that there are always points to be made for both sides of a debate.

There are a few options for discussion on this topic:

- 1- Separate into two sides and conduct a formal organized debate. Instructions for holding a formal debate can be found here:
https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/socstud/frame_found_sr2/tns/tn-13.pdf
- 2- Do individual research and find THREE (3) points of evidence for each side of the debate and hold an informal discussion of the evidence found for the 'pro' side and the 'con' side.

Supporting example arguments and supporting quotations can be found below for both sides and used if needed:

Affirmative:

- Willoughby has a lot of common interests with Marianne, such as their favourite poem.
 - o WILLOUGHBY. Cowper is my favourite poet of our time.
MARIANNE. Cowper may indeed be the greatest poet of *any* time. **Pray**, what is your favorite poem, Mr. Willoughby? Mine must be 'Hope...'
ELINOR. I think –
WILLOUGHBY. (*Interrupting, quoting "Hope."*)
– Oh, see me sworn to serve thee, and command
A painter's skill into a poet's hand!
MARIANNE. That, while I, trembling trace a work divine
Fancy may stand aloof from the design (31)

- Other people gave Marianne the idea that Willoughby was more interested than he was
 - o MRS. JENNINGS. Yes, yes, Mr. Impudence, and I found out WHERE you went in that carriage...I hope you like your future house, Miss Marianne, and I look forward to visiting you at Allenham! (38)

- He indicates several times that his feelings for Marianne were genuine and he could have been telling the truth.
 - o WILLOUGHBY. I did not plan any of this! I never wanted to hurt anyone! (84)

 - o WILLOUGHBY. ...I found myself terrible in love. (84)

 - o WILLOUGHBY. I was going to ask her to marry me! (84)

- He was a victim to the pressures of his **society** after making a mistake.
 - o WILLOUGHBY. ...At first, I thought that surely Marianne also knew that it could not lead to anything. You must see that it is impossible for me to seriously pursue a girl with no fortune, no station, no – forgive me – no notable family... (84)

 - o WILLOUGHBY. I assure you, Miss Dashwood, I have paid richly for my sins. Mrs. Smith pronounced me no gentleman, and I was summarily **disinherited**. I had paid many debts. Should I have gone to prison? I had no practical choice but to give up Marianne! (85)

Opposition:

- Willoughby does not show kindness at his core:
 - o WILLOUGHBY. Colonel Brandon is the kind of man everybody speaks well of, and who nobody cares about.

- He uses Marianne's **Christian name** and this causes people to assume he was invested.
 - o WILLOUGHBY. But, Marianne!
(Elinor starts at the use of Marianne's Christian name...)
Queen Mab is still yours, Marianne. I shall keep her only till you can claim her for your more lasting home. (35)

 - o GOSSIP 2. No news of an engagement yet?
GOSSIP 3. I cannot think why – he uses her Christian name quite openly! (38)

 - o Solemnly engaged

- He bails out of nowhere with no plans of returning after giving Marianne the wrong idea.
 - o WILLOUGHBY. Mrs. Smith has commanded her poor dependent cousin to conduct some business for her in London, right away. I have just received my marching orders, and must leave immediately.
MRS. DASHWOOD. ...Her business will not keep you long from us long, I hope?

WILLOUGHBY. You are very kind, but I do not think I can return to Devonshire soon. Mrs. Smith will not have me more than once a year.

ELINOR. And is Allenham the only house in the neighborhood in which you are welcome? For shame, Willoughby, do you need a formal invitation to visit us here?

WILLOUGHBY. ...You are too good. My engagements at present...are of such a nature –

He comes to an awkward halt.

It is a folly to linger. I will not torment myself by remaining any longer!

Willoughby leaves without bowing. Pause (40)

- He treats her badly when he sees her at the London party
 - o MARIANNE. WILLOUGHBY!!!
Elinor follows behind her, and tries to discreetly pull her back. Discomfited, Willoughby bows
 - WILLOUGHBY. (To Elinor) Miss Dashwood
 - MARIANNE. Willoughby! Good God! Will you not shake hands with me?
He cannot avoid it, but holds her hand only for a moment. (57)

- He gets engaged without explaining anything to Marianne first.
 - o ELINOR. (reading a letter from Willoughby out loud) "...Allow me to be plain: I am sorry if you ever mistook my friendship for something more, but you must acknowledge that anything of that nature and has been impossible – as my affections have long been engaged to another young lady. John Willoughby" (59)

Who Said It?

In *Sense and Sensibility*, personality traits of the characters are shown in their lines. For example, quotations from Marianne are emotional and animated, while Elinor's lines are more reserved and practical. Edward is awkward while Willoughby is overly suave, and Colonel Brandon is generous while John Dashwood is greedy. Fanny and Mrs. Ferrars are unkind, and in contrast, Mrs. Jennings is caring. It is surprising how easily lines from the play can be attributed to the proper character. Below is a list of lines from Kate Hamill's adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*. After reading the lines, see if they can be properly categorized by character. Answer options: Elinor, Marianne, Edward, John Dashwood, Fanny, Colonel Brandon, John Willoughby, and Mrs. Jennings.

Who Said It?	Quotation
1.	"The china is a material consideration. It is absolutely unnecessary to do more, I think, than to help them move comfortably. How liberal and handsome you are, my lamb" (12)
2.	"Perhaps he is not even widely considered 'handsome.' But once you notice his eyes, which are uncommonly good, and consider the general sweetness of his expression...well, I find him very handsome indeed." (19)
3.	"Edward, please. Hamlet is not making polite conversation! In this speech, he is all of mankind – all of humankind – railing against the forces that would keep us tame – that prevent us from action upon on soul's truest impulses. It is a desperate cry against the futility of a life less than entirely lived! You must be driven almost mad by PASSION, by RAGE, by love for the FRAIL BEAUTY OF LIFE ITSELF!" (16)
4.	"People always live forever when there is annuity to be paid to them." (12)
5.	"Miss Dashwood, forgive me. In utter self-reproach, I cast myself at your feet. To once again bask in the light of your sweet approbation, I surrender my case entirely." (33)
6.	" – Yes. I am. Writing. A letter, yes. Oh. Are you, I see – are you well?" (13)
7.	"I am entirely resolved that this go 'round, you both must come with me to town, as my guests, and keep a stupid old woman hopping!" (52)
8.	"Would you be willing to tell him that I would name him as a rector, if he thinks it worth his acceptance? I only wish it were more valuable, but it is enough for him to marry upon." (79)

ANSWER KEY:

Who Said It?	Quotation
1. John Dashwood	"The china is a material consideration. It is absolutely unnecessary to do more, I think, than to help them move comfortably. How liberal and handsome you are, my lamb" (12)
2. Elinor Dashwood	"Perhaps he is not even widely considered 'handsome.' But once you notice his eyes, which are uncommonly good, and consider the general sweetness of his expression...well, I find him very handsome indeed." (19)
3. Marianne Dashwood	"Edward, please. Hamlet is not making polite conversation! In this speech, he is all of mankind – all of humankind – railing against the forces that would keep us tame – that prevent us from action upon on soul's truest impulses. It is a desperate cry against the futility of a life less than entirely lived! You must be driven almost mad by PASSION, by RAGE, by love for the FRAIL BEAUTY OF LIFE ITSELF!" (16)
4. Fanny Dashwood	"People always live forever when there is annuity to be paid to them." (12)
5. John Willoughby	"Miss Dashwood, forgive me. In utter self-reproach, I cast myself at your feet. To once again bask in the light of your sweet approbation, I surrender my case entirely." (33)
6. Edward Ferrars	" – Yes. I am. Writing. A letter, yes. Oh. Are you, I see – are you well?" (13)
7. Mrs. Jennings	"I am entirely resolved that this go 'round, you both must come with me to town, as my guests, and keep a stupid old woman hopping!" (52)
8. Colonel Brandon	"Would you be willing to tell him that I would name him as a rector, if he thinks it worth his acceptance? I only wish it were more valuable, but it is enough for him to marry upon." (79)

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