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# Pride and Prejudice

## Lesson 1: Openings

### Lesson Plan and Resources

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# Pride and Prejudice

## Lesson 1: Openings

### Clip Resources

How film and television adaptations have approached the opening of the novel

**Main Adaptation:**  
***Pride and Prejudice (1995)***

*Adapted by Andrew Davies; produced by Sue Birtwistle.*

[▶ Watch here](#) 

**Secondary Adaptation:**  
***Pride and Prejudice (2005)***

*Adapted by Deborah Moggach; directed by Joe Wright.*

[▶ Watch here](#) 

### Skills and Objectives

#### GCSE Literature Assessment Objectives

AO1	Read, understand and respond to texts
AO2	Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate
AO3	Understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written

#### GCSE Language Assessment Objectives

Reading AO2	Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views
Reading AO3	Compare writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts
Writing AO5	Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences
Spoken Language AO8	Listen and respond appropriately to spoken language, including to questions and feedback to presentations

## Scene Setting

### Where we are in the novel and television adaptation:

In the first two chapters of the novel, Jane Austen introduces the Bennet family and sets up the main premise of the novel that the Bennet sisters need to find husbands. Readers are left anticipating what the arrival of the wealthy bachelor, Mr Bingley, will mean for this family and the local community. The challenge for television and film adaptations is to introduce these characters and create this sense of anticipation and disruption in visual terms as well as through dialogue.

## Starting Points

### Pre-reading option

Take the opportunity to close read the novel's opening sentence. Discover if students have heard it before? Discuss what it means and whose opinion of the 'single man' might be being expressed here. Then read the second paragraph which reveals this is the view of the 'neighbourhood' and 'surrounding families', not simply the Bennets.

### Post-reading option

Once students have read Chapter 1, ask them to look at how Austen has structured it: the movement from a generalised opening statement, to a comment on the neighbourhood and then introducing the particular situation of the Bennet family through Mr and Mrs Bennet's conversation. Invite them to map out this structure using **Resource 1.1**. The parallel with a camera cutting from an establishing shot of the neighbourhood to Longbourn to a two-shot of the Bennets might be a useful analogy to draw here.

### Revision option

Ask students to consider Chapters 1 and 2 as two halves of a joke set-up, where Mr Bennet at first teases Mrs Bennet, pretending to refuse to visit Mr Bingley and then continues to taunt her and his daughters in the process before he delivers the punchline that he has already called on Mr Bingley that morning. Consider why Austen chooses to open like this: it's an amusing way to hook the reader into the action; it shows them much about the Bennets' characters, hinting at their faults as parents (and the flaws in their marriage).

Introduce Jane Austen's advice to her niece, Anna, about her own developing ideas for a novel (see **Resource 1.2**) and ask students how closely Austen has followed her own advice in Chapters 1 and 2.



# Main Activities

## An energetic opening ([click here to launch the digital tool](#))

Play the opening clip from the 1995 television adaptation and ask students for their immediate reactions. Elicit how and why it is different from the novel opening. For instance, Mr and Mrs Bennet are not the first to appear. Instead, we see the object of their dialogue – Mr Bingley (and Darcy) – galloping across the English countryside to view Netherfield. They are observed in turn by Elizabeth out on a ramble, who doesn't appear in person in the novel until Chapter 2.

Introduce Davies' comment that 'above all' he wanted 'to avoid the opening line from the novel being spoken around a tea table' (R4 The Reunion 30th Anniversary of the 1995 P&P, 2025). Ask if students have spotted where the opening sentence is introduced instead: who speaks it and how it is delivered? The conversation happens as the Bennets return home from church, so the family learn the news of Bingley's arrival together. The teasing of Mrs Bennet is condensed during their short walk.

Draw out from the discussion of the opening clip that by introducing Darcy and Elizabeth first, both visually and through dialogue, Davies places the novel's protagonists front and centre rather than Mr and Mrs Bennet. Share with students that Austen would not have started the novel with Bingley's and Darcy's conversation, because she very rarely wrote scenes with men alone together.

If time allows, discuss how the television adaptation's opening encapsulates some main themes and characteristics of the novel. These include Mr Bingley's arrival at Netherfield; the contrast between urban, upper-class society and 'country manners' (Darcy warns Bingley that the society will be 'something savage'); the two men's evident entitlement, self-confidence and wealth as demonstrated in Darcy's 'You'd better take it'. The boisterousness of the Bennet household with the five girls and the need to make a profitable marriage are also signalled as being of importance. Visual detail replaces some dialogue with the Mr Bennet's soft spot for Elizabeth being revealed as they exchange smiles through his library window and the gender power dynamic of the young men's fast-moving horses contrasts with Elizabeth walking alone.

([Click here](#) to watch a clip of Andrew Davies explaining his creative decisions behind the opening scenes).

## An opening framed by literary context

Play the opening clip of the 2005 film adaptation and elicit students' thoughts. Using the skills developed in the close analysis of the 1995 clip, invite them to pool ideas in groups of 3 or 4 about what aspects of the novel the film emphasises. Ideas to gather might include:

- The initial focus on Elizabeth as she finishes a novel walking across the field to Longbourn (focusing on this open book reveals it to be *Pride and Prejudice*)
- The depiction of the Longbourn estate and the Bennets' home and what it reveals about the Bennets' social position?
- The domestic chaos of the Bennet household – Mary at the piano, clothes being mended, vast amounts of laundry hanging outdoors, farm animals and pets
- That the conversation between Mr and Mrs Bennet about Bingley taking Netherfield is 'private' as it is in the novel, but the younger girls are eavesdropping
- The girls flock behind their father through the house while he withholds the fact that he has already visited Bingley.

## Creative writing - Missing dialogue

In the novel, Jane and Elizabeth often share their thoughts and feelings on the latest events that involve themselves, family and friends. From what you know of them, so far, write a short dialogue of 6-10 lines where they discuss how Mr Bennet teased them all into thinking he would not call on Mr Bingley. They could start like this...

**JANE:** Poor Mama. I do wish our father would not tease her so often.

**ELIZABETH:** He kept it going a long time this time. How about when he suggested Mr Bingley might choose her as his bride?

To round off, invite students to read their dialogues and compare them across the class. What ideas emerge about the sisters and their relationship?

## Character and performance: Introducing Mr and Mrs Bennet ([click here to launch the digital tool](#))

Revisit the characters of Mr and Mrs Bennet through Austen's descriptions of them in Chapter 1

Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three-and-twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. Her mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper. When she was discontented, she fancied herself nervous. The business of her life was to get her daughters married: its solace was visiting and news.

Place students in pairs and allocate each pair either Mr or Mrs Bennet to focus on. Ask them to record evidence of the Bennets' character traits in **Resource 1.3** for both the 1995 and 2005 adaptations. Before they report back to the class, they could also decide which current actors they would cast as their Mr or Mrs Bennet.

([Click here](#) to watch clip of Andrew Davies explaining the traits of each character's dialogue).



## Extensions

**What makes a good opening?** – In his book *Into the Woods: How stories work and why we tell them* (Penguin 2014), John Yorke refers to the opening of a narrative as a ‘set-up’ or a ‘call to arms’. In both a novel and in the script for a screen adaptation it is where the author introduces the characters, setting and presents the plot problem. It is also where the reader or audience member is hooked into the narrative via the call to arms. Invite pairs to apply Yorke’s criteria to Chapters 1 and 2 of the novel and to one of the adaptation openings. How successful is Austen’s novel and the adaptation in these terms?

**Adaptations across time – Watch the opening to the 1940 film. (02.02”-13.57”)**. Like the opening of Austen’s novel, the film moves from the general to the particular, beginning with the establishing shot of the bustling Meryton, news spreading through the town via the haberdasher’s shop and then the conversation between Mr and Mrs Bennet. But much is also different in this film adaptation. Ask students to identify these differences and their significance. They may consider, for example: introducing Jane, Elizabeth and their mother in a retail context; showing Lydia and Kitty already fraternising with the militia, including Wickham; Mary’s reluctance to leave the bookshop; Darcy and Bingley’s impressive entourage arriving in town; and the carriage race between the Bennets and the Lucases to get home with the news of Bingley’s arrival.

**Drama** – Invite a small group to take on the characters and read through the opening scenes of Rob Brannen’s theatre adaptation (*Imaginarium/Shakespeare North Playhouse*, 2024) in **Resource 2.3**. As they read through a second time, the class can note down the details that tie in directly to Chapters 1 and 2 of the novel but which the playwright has given a 21stC twist. For example, what do they think of the sisters’ song that opens the show, introducing the five Bennet daughters?

The read-through group might like to develop their reading, adding actions and props to show the characters’ 21st century attitudes, for instance scrolling on their phones.

**It’s all in the costume** – Students may have noticed that the costumes in the 1940, 1995 and 2005 adaptations differ greatly in their styles. The lavishness of the costumes in the 1940 film was a treat for cinema-goers because silks and damask fabrics were in short supply due to the Second World War. The female characters are also dressed in the style of the mid-nineteenth century, with very full skirts and wide ‘Bo Peep’ bonnets, in a visual reference to another popular Hollywood film of this time, *Gone with the Wind* (1939).

In comparison, the 1995 television adaptation features simple empire-line muslin dresses which were typical of the Regency period (1810-1830) when the novel was published. Many of these dresses were constructed of sari material to get the quality and effect of the near transparent cottons popular at the time.

The women’s clothing depicted in the 2005 adaptation is inspired by the style of the 1790s when Austen drafted the novel as *First Impressions*. In the film, the colour palette of everyday clothing is muted and women’s skirts are full, conveying a greater sense of freedom of movement.

Encourage students to explain which costumes they prefer and describe how they fit the mood and atmosphere of their chosen adaptation opening. They could also be tasked to decide which brands the main characters would wear today and how these might signify the social differences between them and their personalities.

**Language** – Austen portrays Mr and Mrs Bennet as an ‘Odd Couple’. Invite students to find examples of what they do and say in the novel that make them very different from each other. Are there any expressions they use several times? Students can create a Venn diagram of their findings using **Resource 1.4**.

These ideas might form the start of a character diary for the Bennets. It could be added to as students progress through the novel and expanded to include more characters.

**Setting** – Longbourn is not described in detail in the opening chapters of the novel. Explore how it is translated to the screen in the 1995 and 2005 adaptations. As a class, find two film frames that sum up each setting and ask student to explain the choices the directors have made in portraying the Bennet’s home.

# Glossary

## From Chapter 1

**Chaise** – open carriage

**Michaelmas** – the time marking the end of the 3rd quarter of the year – 29th September

**Tiresome** – annoying

**To engage for** – to be prepared to do

**Establishment** – home and estate

**Over scrupulous** – to careful

**Vexing** – annoying

**Understanding** – intellect

**Solace** – comfort

**Caprice** – unaccountable changes of mood or behaviour

## From Chapter 2

**Disclosed** – revealed

**Trimming** – decorating

**Deigned not** – thought it not fit, did not stoop to

**Scolding** – telling off

**Discretion** – care, sensitivity

**Circumspection** – being cautious, wariness

**Emphatic** – strong, forceful

**Surpassing** – exceeding, outdoing

**Tumult** – uproar, disorder

**Raptures** – bliss, joys

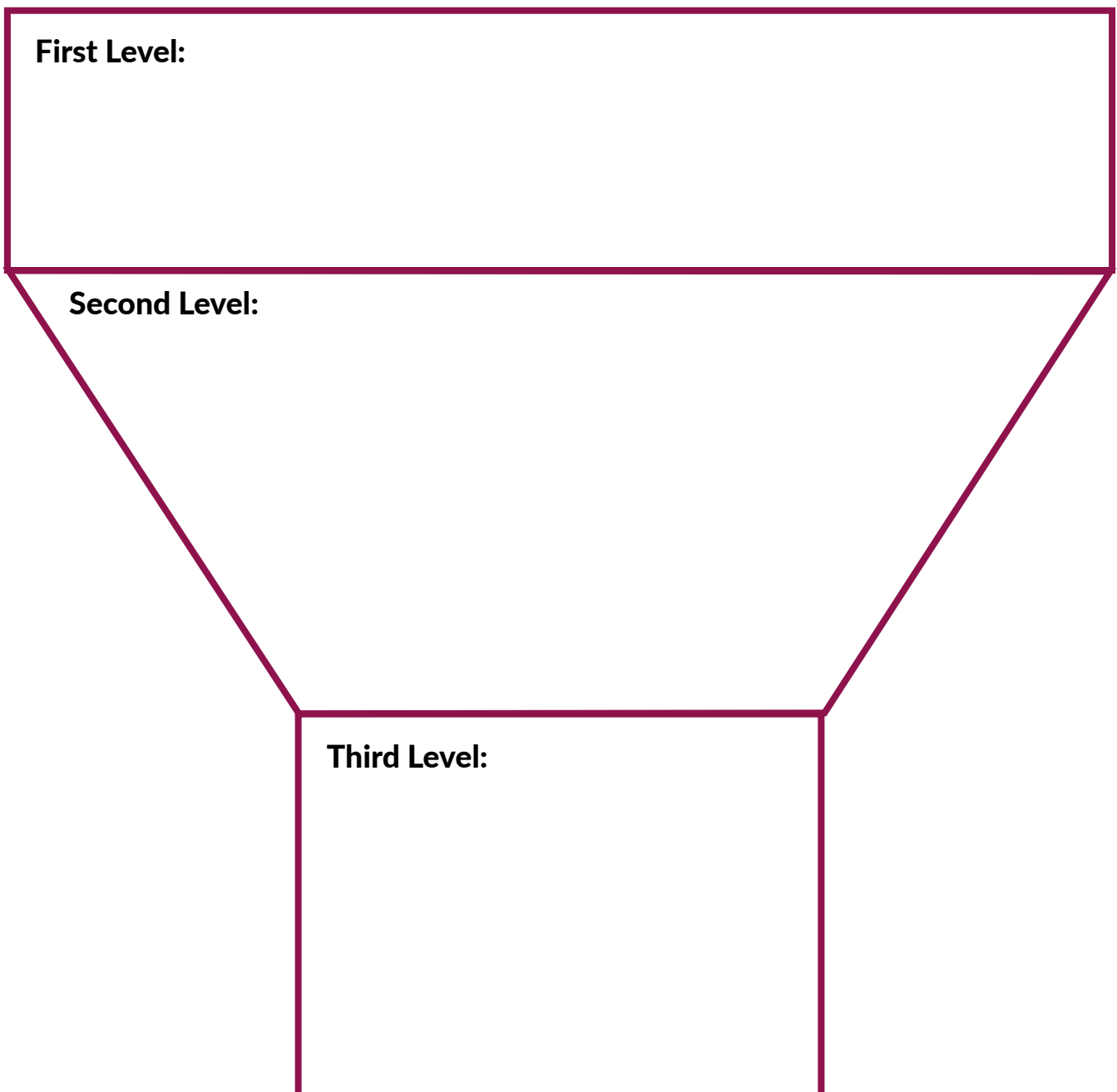
**Conjecturing** – speculating guessing

# *Pride and Prejudice* Resources for Lesson 1

## Resource 1.1 - Mapping out Chapter 1 and 2

Use the diagram below to map out the structure of Chapter 1.

How does it move from the general view to the particular views of Mr and Mrs Bennet?



## Resource 1.2 – Jane Austen’s advice on writing a novel

Read the advice that Austen gave to her niece about how best to find characters and situations for the perfect novel.

Write notes around the extract to explain how Austen takes her own advice in Chapters 1 and 2.

**Chawton (Sept 9 1814)**

MY DEAR ANNA ...

You are now collecting your people delightfully, getting them exactly into such a spot as is the delight of my life. Three or four families in a country village is the very thing to work on, and I hope you will do a great deal more, and make full use of them while they are so very favourably arranged. You are but now coming to the heart and beauty of your story. Until the heroine grows up the fun must be imperfect, but I expect a great deal of entertainment from the next three or four books, and I hope you will not resent these remarks by sending me no more.

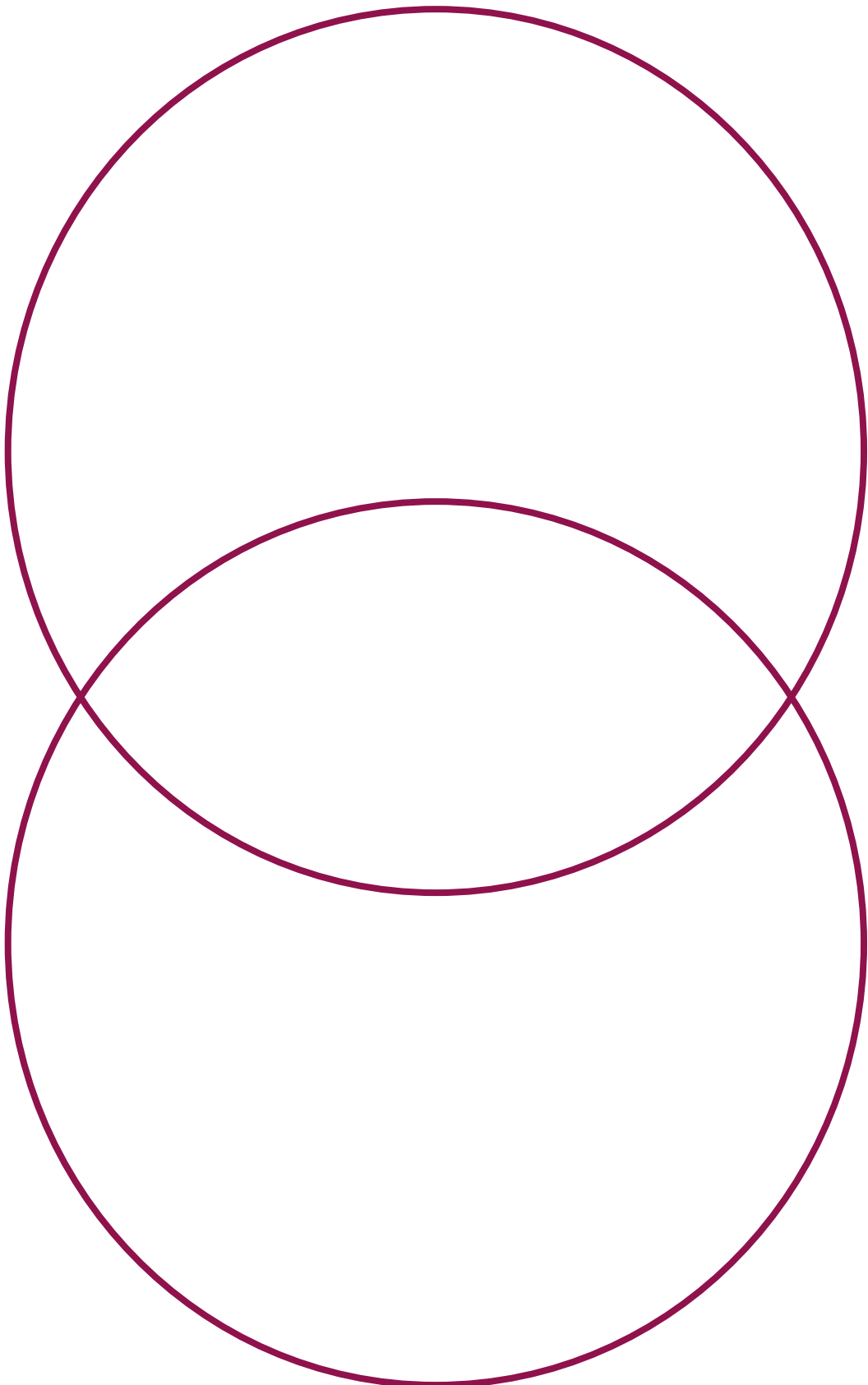


## Resource 1.4 - Mr and Mrs Bennet in the novel

Use the Venn Diagram to record your ideas about what Mr Bennet and Mrs Bennet say and do. What overlaps do you find between them?

Mrs Bennet

Mr Bennet



## Resource 1.5 – Pride and Prejudice on stage – a 21st century opening

Playwright Rob Brannen has brought the opening up to date in this extract. After you read it, through search for the details from Chapters 1 and 2 that he has given the 21st century treatment.

### 1. Prologue

*Georgie runs onto stage as though being pursued, darting around.. She is breathless, eyes wide. A troubled mind. We hear Darcy's voice off stage.*

Darcy: George! Georgie!

*(Startled, she runs off stage and he enters.)*

Darcy: Georgie please!

*(He slumps to his knees, broken. She slowly re-enters. He sees her and gets to his feet. She rushes to his arms.)*

Darcy: Georgie, look at me. Look at me. It's OK. It's going to be OK. I won't let him hurt you again. I promise. I'm going to get you some help. OK? Trust me. *(With some force...)* OK?

*(She nods. He holds her tight, as we hear the sound of the Bennet sisters' music. They exit.)*

### 2. Introducing the Bennets

#### **Bennet Sisters Song**

Jane! Lizzy! Mary! Kitty! Lydia!

We're not the Nolans

We're not the Spice Girls

We're not the Brontës

We're the Bennet Sisters!

We're Single like cream on peaches

Single like Geography teachers  
Single like a vinyl 45  
We're single women living a single lives  
We're single everyone resists us  
Single no one has kissed us  
Single livin' just like Cliff does  
We're the Bennet sisters  
I'm in the mood for tinder, I'm a spinster  
And I'm feeling alone tonight  
I'm in the mood to speed-date, need a roommate  
To stimulate my appetite  
I'm in the mood  
Got an aptitude  
I'm feeling crude for love! ('not now Kitty, there's people watching!')Eyes like bullets, tongues got blisters  
Lookin out for you and for me my sis does  
Watch out all you Misters  
We're the Bennet sisters!  
We're not the Nolans  
We're not the Spice Girls  
We're not the Brontës  
We're the Bennet Sisters!

**Lizzy:** You think you've seen this one before? Well, buckle up and park your preconceptions, your pride and prejudice.

*(Enter Mrs Bennet as we snap into a scene.)*

**Mrs Bennet:** Well, look at you lot all 'girls with attitude' but all still living at home

with Mum and Dad aren't you?

**Lizzy:** There's no way we can afford to get on the housing ladder though or even rent a place of our own.

**Jane:** Unless you'd like to guarantee our rent like posh parents do!

**Mrs Bennet:** For five of you? Dream on!

**Lydia:** We won't need your money, Mum. Me and Kit are gonna be Influencers' on Tiktok, Insta, YouTube and that...

**Kitty:** And make millions before we're even twenty!

**Mrs Bennet:** You'll be on the social you two, never mind social media. Youtube? You-niversal Credit more like!

**Mary:** Yeah, we're stuck here aren't we?

**Mrs Bennet:** I keep telling you... there's two ways out of here... win the lottery or land someone with a bit of cash...

**All:** And as we don't do the lottery...

**Mrs Bennet:** Get fishing my girls... get fishing!

*(Mrs Bennet exits. All but Lizzy whip out their phones and are on tinder.)*

**Kitty:** Swipe left!

**Lydia:** Swipe left!

**Jane:** Come on Lizzie! You've got to swipe a lot of frogs before you see your prince!

**Lizzy:** Don't mind frogs, it's always the princes that worry me.

**Mary:** Swipe left! I'm getting' repetitive strain injury in me finger...

**Kitty:** *(from Tinder)* 'Bigboy from Bootle, has his own Fiat 500 and is looking for sexy times'...

**Lydia:** Swipe left!

**Jane:** Swear these are all police mugshots.... Where's the fit ones with a bit of cash? I'm giving up in a minute!

**Lizzy:** It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

**Lydia:** Yer what?

**Jane:** Where'd yer get that from?

**Lizzy:** Must've read it somewhere, s'pose.

**Mary:** I uploaded a video of me singing my latest composition and not one swipe or like!

**Kitty:** *(rolling her eyes at Lydia)* Some people have no taste, Mary.

**Jane:** I've had a swipe right and we've been messaging!

**Kitty:** He looks alright!

**Lydia:** Well buff!

**Jane:** And now he's just sent a video...

**Lydia:** Let's see!

**Kitty:** Play it! play it!

*(Jane plays the video and all recoil in horror.)*

**Jane:** Some men are weird!

**All:** Block him!!!!

*(Mrs Bennet rushes back in, flapping in high excitement.)*

**Mrs Bennet:** News! News! News! Up the road's sold! The big one... the lodge... the hall.. the 'what do you call it'...

**Jane:** Netherby Lodge?

**Mary:** Nobody's ever lived there have they?

**Mrs Bennet:** Course they have. It's been quite a while though.

**Kitty:** Me and Lydia once broke in with Mosh and Frankie and a bottle of...

**Lydia:** Not now Kitty!

**Mrs Bennet:** *(shouting for her husband)* Barry! Barry! Where's your father?

*(All shrug. Mr Bennet enters behind Mrs Bennet with glasses on his forehead and a mobile phone sticking out of his back pocket.)*

**Mrs Bennet:** *(loud shout)* BARRY!!! *(She turns and is startled by him right next to her).* Oh, my nerves! I swear I'm going to get you a collar and bell fitted!

**Mr Bennet:** Can someone try ringing my glasses? I've searched the whole house...

**Mr Bennet:** I'm just telling the girls if you'd care to listen!

**Mr Bennet:** I always listen to you, luvvie, whether I retain any of the information is a different thing all together.

**Mrs Bennet:** Netherby Lodge has been sold to a young wealthy bloke from out of town. London they say.

**Mr Bennet:** I'm constantly amazed how you know every little detail of the local news?

**Mrs Bennet:** Sal from the bakery just text me.

**Jane:** Sal, from the bakery? How does she know?

**Mrs Bennet:** She found out over the sale of some crusty bloomers.

**Mr Bennet:** From a woman who sells second-hand knickers?

**Mrs Bennet:** Not that kind of crusty bloomers! One of her best customers is an estate agent, who I went to see pretending to be interested in a move and made some casual enquiries about the purchase of the Lodge.

**Lizzy:** Oh, Mum you didn't!

**Mrs Bennet:** Well, you've got to keep abreast of things! And the agent said it was all but sold to this young feller. And word's just got back to Sal, that it's gone through, and he's already moved in! We're all but neighbours...

**Mary:** Neighbours?

**Mrs Bennet:** Well, it's a bit of a distance but the lodge does back onto this estate!

**Mr Bennet:** Oh, you're talking about the new feller moved into the big house? I bumped into him at the garage. Anyone seen my glasses and my phone?

**All:** What's he like?!

**Mr Bennet:** Nice car. It was a kind of blue... or green... would you call it metallic turquoise perhaps? It was definitely a Porsche.

**Lydia and Kitty:** *(with great excitement)* A Porsche!!!

**Mr Bennet:** Or was it a Peugeot? I get those two mixed up.

**Jane:** But what's he like?

**Mr Bennet:** You're not going to believe this... but my glasses were in my back pocket and my phone was on my head all along... silly old Mr B...

**All sisters:** Dad!!!

**Mr Bennet:** What? Oh yes...Can't really remember, but quite tall and tanned... (*The sisters respond very positively to this*) ...or was he short with bad skin? Anyway, said he was going to that community charity dance thing at Preccleston Town Hall on Saturday night... seemed keen to get to know the town and integrate like.

**Lydia:** Integrate!!!

**Kitty:** Oh yes!!!

**Mrs Bennet:** Bingo! Action stations, girls! If one of my daughters could be happily settled in a big posh house, then the domestication dominoes will fall one after the other, and you'll all be equally sorted in no time! Dig out your best outfits! Saturday night will be one hell of a night!