



Pride and Prejudice

Lesson 2: The Balls

Lesson Plan and Resources

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Pride and Prejudice

Lesson 2: The Meryton and Netherfield Balls

Clip Resources

A country dance at Meryton and a courtly dance at Netherfield

Main Adaptation:
Pride and Prejudice (1995)

Adapted by Andrew Davies; produced by Sue Birtwistle.

Meryton: [▶ Watch here](#)

Netherfield (pt 1): [▶ Watch here](#)

Netherfield (pt 2): [▶ Watch here](#)

Secondary Adaptation:
Pride and Prejudice (2005)

Adapted by Deborah Moggach; directed by Joe Wright.

Meryton: [▶ Watch here](#)

Netherfield: [▶ 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:

The ball at Meryton takes place in Ch.3 and is where the Bingley party are first introduced to the Bennets and the reader. There is a relaxed atmosphere that Bingley enjoys but Darcy and Miss Bingley look down on. Netherfield Ball comes later in Ch.19 and is more formal and sophisticated. It is held by Mr Bingley who responds enthusiastically to Lydia and Kitty's request for a ball, and hopes for the chance to dance with Jane again. After she overhears Darcy reject her at the Meryton Ball, Elizabeth accepts his invitation to dance at Netherfield.

Starting Points

Pre-reading option

Introduce the idea that a ball was one of the few opportunities for young people to be close and get to know one another. A dance often lasted 20 minutes and though dancing was in groups there were also pauses allowing a chance to talk. Watch the clip from the BBC documentary *Pride and Prejudice: Having a Ball* to get an idea from the young dancers' reactions in this restaging of a Georgian ball as to how physically exciting the experience was. It may help to use the analogy of house parties or festivals in today's culture.

Post-reading option

Ask students what impressions they get from reading Ch.3 - Meryton Ball. How much of the ball is described in terms of the dances and the music? Explore why these aspects are not so important to the narrative as the characters' first impressions of one another? Elicit that this ball is as much about observing others and talking as dancing.

Using the concentric circle diagram in **Resource 2.1**, students can note down their ideas about Darcy from this first encounter, starting with his outward appearance, then his words and actions, then what his character seems to be like. (They could add to this diagram as they read further into the novel.)

Revision option

Revisit the characters of Darcy and Miss Bingley. Rereading the text, what are students' first impressions of them? Ask them to draw a quick character map of how they think each develops from here over the novel. Then feedback as a class.

Main Activities

What Elizabeth overhears at the Meryton Ball ([click here to launch the digital tool](#))

Compare the novel's portrayal of this with the two adaptations. Discuss which version makes Darcy's words and opinions more offensive and describe how Elizabeth reacts in the novel and both adaptations?

([Click here](#) to watch an additional clip of producer Sue Birtwhistle talking about the Bingley's arrival at Meryton ball).

Miscommunications: To distil the meanings from this first interaction at the ball, ask students to rewrite the dialogue as a series of WhatsApp messages where Darcy's comments about Elizabeth and the other young women at the ball get sent to her rather than Bingley and then the aftermath of this in messages between the women.

The dance with Darcy at the Netherfield Ball ([click here to launch the digital tool](#))

Remind students that Elizabeth has had a disappointing night before she dances with Darcy – Wickham is absent, and she has had to endure dancing with Mr Collins. She is also still smarting from Darcy's refusal to dance with her at the Meryton Ball.

Watch the clip and then introduce this quotation from Andrew Davies:

At the Netherfield Ball there's a conversation between Darcy and Elizabeth that's almost like a fencing match caught in a dance. It echoes a tango or a paso doble. There's a lot of stamping feet, they come together and they part, and some turns they make are like the turns of a matador. You get a sense of combat as well as dancing.

Ask pairs to write down 2 or 3 words or phrases that describe what the dance adds to their verbal battle and how their looks and actions shows they are attracted to each other. They can use **Resource 2.2** to record their ideas.

To share these ideas as a class, use a fishbowl activity where one pair enact the dance while another circles them, giving their comments on what Darcy and Elizabeth are really thinking and feeling. This can be repeated with further pairs. It fits nicely with the idea of everyone being scrutinised at the ball.

- (**Navigate to Chapter 18 in the novel pane of the tool**)

The digital tool highlights Jane Austen's use of language in the verbal battle between Elizabeth and Darcy which creates their witty but fierce dialogue.

Ask students to write a short analysis of this dialogue and then to describe what the 1995 adaptation adds to this through its choreography of the dance.

([Click here](#) to watch clip of Jane Gibson explaining how the melody and body language of the dance can tell the story).

Creative writing

Invite students to write two diary entries – one after the Meryton Ball and one after the Netherfield Ball. They may choose to write from Elizabeth's or from Darcy's perspective. Students can work in pairs – one writing as each character and then compare their diaries.

Or students can be encouraged to write diary entries from the point of view of other characters, such as Jane, Bingley, Lydia, Charlotte or Mrs Bennet. They should consider how their chosen character's opinions and feelings may have developed between the two balls and reflect these developments in their writing.

After students complete their diary entries, watch the 2005 film adaptation of each ball and discuss how they contrast with the novel and the 1995 adaptation.

Character and performance

Introduce students to the idea of actors overplaying or underplaying a scene to create different effects.

Start by explaining the idea of over- and underplaying as an actor. Then read some lines of Mrs Bennet's from the 1995 adaptation of Meryton Ball and ask students to listen and decide whether each is being over- or underplayed.

Some groups could look at how Mrs Bennet is played at the Netherfield Ball in both adaptations and compare this with how he is presented in the novel.

Other groups could take the Bingley sisters and study them at the Meryton Ball in both adaptations before going back to see how they are portrayed in the novel.

Groups can feed back to the class on the effects of these performances using **Resource 2.3**.

Extensions

Language: The Bennets' behaviour at Netherfield (Click here to launch digital tool) – Students first re-read Ch.19 making the actions and talk of the Bennet sisters and their parents their focus.

Then view the shorter clip from the 1995 adaptation and 2005 film clip of the ball. How does this compare with the novel descriptions? Who is Elizabeth most embarrassed by? How does this relate to the ways they feel their families are embarrassing to them?

What does it say about Mrs Bennet's decision that their carriage will be the last to leave the ball? Ask them to think ahead to Darcy's criticism of their behaviour in his first proposal speech to Elizabeth (Ch. 34).

Context – Ask students to consider the dance choices the screen writer and consequently the choreographers make in each of the adaptations. Also, what effects are created by the camera shots selected?

How do these dances match the characters' emotions and reflect the social status of the organiser or hosts of each ball? Choreographer Jane Gibson chose fast jigs and reels for Meryton, whereas the stately longways dance selected for Darcy and Elizabeth at Netherfield was Mr Beveridge's 'Maggot' a maggot being another word for a 'fancy'.

Setting: visual texts versus written word texts

– Ask students to consider why Austen does not spend time describing the setting in detail for either ball? Her audience would have been familiar with the customs and look of ball; the novel has different priorities to the adaptations. Invite them to reflect on the ways the setting of the Meryton Ball is visualised in each of the adaptations. What are the differences? What effects are created by these choices of setting?

Drama – How could the Netherfield Ball be staged for a theatre production of *Pride and Prejudice*? Invite students to read the extract in Resource 2.4 that show how the ball is presented in Rob Brannen's theatre adaptation (*Imaginarium/Shakespeare North Playhouse*, 2024). Students could then begin to devise their own setting and staging for the ball.

Writing: 'On the way to the balls' – As a way to encourage student to explore characters' expectations of the balls and what happens in between them, ask them to write a short screenplay extract for a conversation between two or three characters as they travel by carriage to each ball. For instance, Darcy and the Bingleys on their way to Meryton. Or Elizabeth and Jane on their way to Netherfield. instance scrolling on their phones.

Glossary

From Chapter 3: Meryton Ball

Suppositions and surmises – beliefs in something with no proof

Eluded – avoided/escaped

Assembly – public gathering for a dance

Entertained – considered possible

Ascertaining – finding out

Disconcerted – concerned/unsettled

Countenance – appearance of face

Unaffected – natural and genuine

Decided – unquestionable

Mein (mien) – look or manner

Forbidding – unfriendly/threatening

Amiable – friendly

Scarcity – lack

Insupportable – unable to be tolerated

Engaged – already have a dance partner

Glossary (Continued)

From Chapter 3: Meryton Ball (cont.)

Fastidious – fussy/ wishing to be correct

Beheld – saw

Tolerable – good enough

Slighted – rejected/not shown respect

Cordial – pleasantly polite

Disposition – nature

Distinguished – took particular notice of

Expectations – prospects/ hopes of achieving something

Vexed – upset

Boulangier – a lively French group dance

Compassion – sympathy

Conceited – proud/self-important

Set downs – put downs

Detest – strongly dislike

From Chapter 18: Netherfield Ball

Unsubdued – not yet won over

Intelligence – news/message

Tolerable – good enough

Surmount – overcome

Exstasy – great happiness and relief

Simpleton – fool

Gratifying – pleasing

Taciturn – quiet/reserved

Posterity – for ever more

Affirmative – positive response

Hauteur – great pride/condescension

Perceiving – noticing

First circles – highest levels of society

Upbraiding – scolding/reprimanding

Unappeasable – not able to be resolved/settled

Incumbent on – necessary for

Gravity – seriousness

Credit – merit/positive light

Procured – obtained

Disdain – scorn

Assertions – claims

Infamous – disreputable

Insolent – blatantly rude

Paltry – weak

Complacency – being smug/taking things for granted

Solicitude – caring about someone

Sentiment – thought and feeling

Exultation – feeling triumphant

Impertinent – arrogantly rude

Inclination – wish

Laity – non-church society

Clerical – of the church

Humility – being humble/modest

Bent – directed

Perverseness – not usual/normal situation

Enumerating – listing/numbering

Self-gratulation – self congratulation

Consign – hand over

Etiquette – accepted rules of behaviour

Felicity – feeling great happiness/luck

Intelligible – easy to understand

Indignant – annoyed at unfairness

Mortification – embarrassment and shame

Stanzas – verses

Impenetrably – unfathomable

Conciliatory – calming/pacifying

Allusions – mentions/references

Languor – tired boredom

Persuasion – a way of thinking, a belief

Eclipsed – made less important/overshadowed

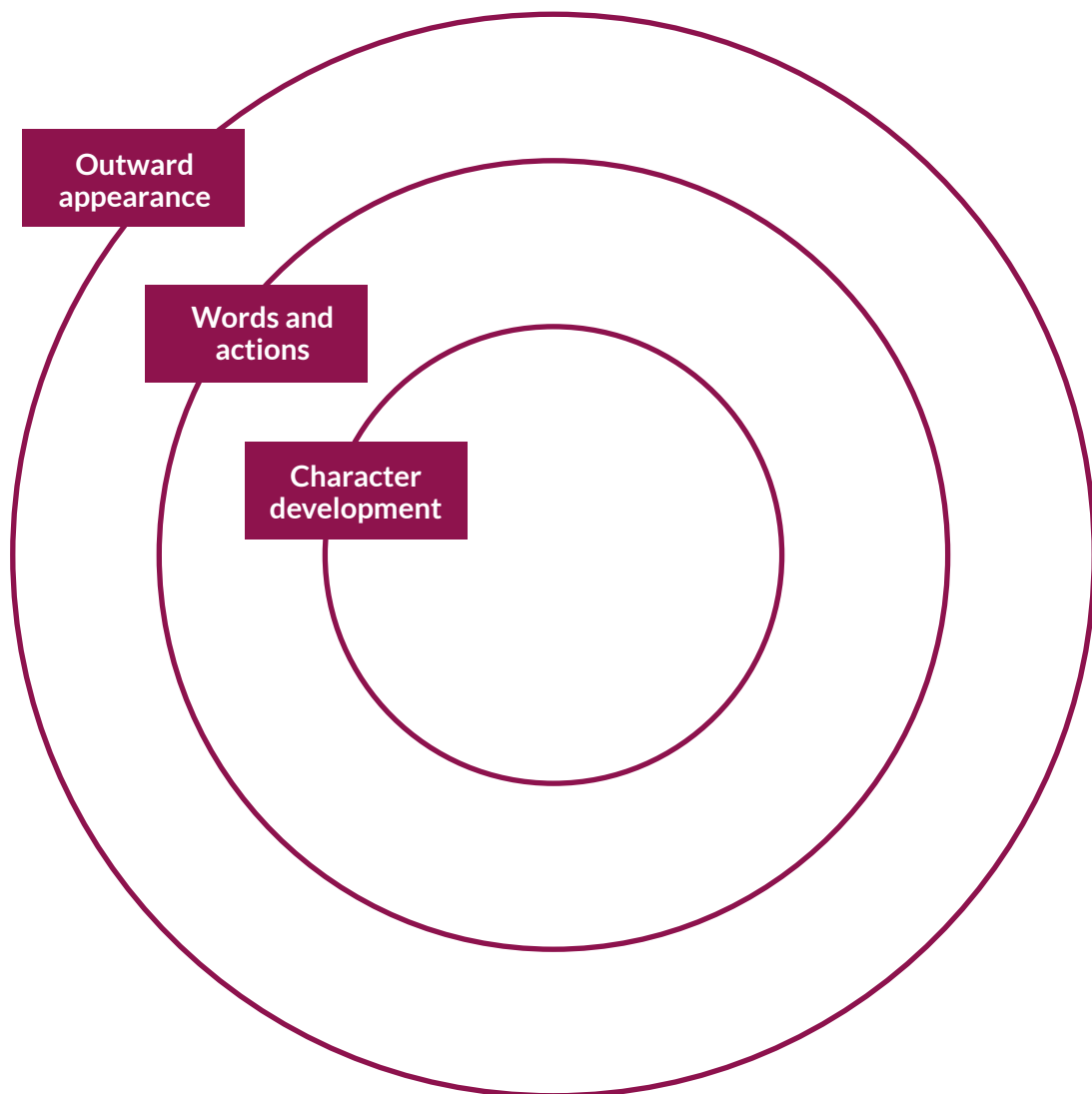
Pride and Prejudice Resources for Lesson 2

Resource 2.1: Layers of Darcy

Use this diagram to make notes about the three layers of Darcy:

- His outward appearance
- His words and actions
- His character development

Start with the Meryton Ball. Later you could continue it for the Netherfield Ball.



Try this approach with other characters from *Pride and Prejudice*.

Resource 2.2: Talking and dancing at the Netherfield Ball

Here is Andrew Davies' view of the conversation that Darcy and Elizabeth have at the Netherfield Ball.

- His outward appearance
- His words and actions

At the Netherfield Ball there's a conversation between Darcy and Elizabeth that's almost like a fencing match caught in a dance. It echoes a tango or a paso doble. There's a lot of stamping feet, they come together and they part, and some turns they make are like the turns of a matador. You get a sense of combat as well as dancing.

Resource 2.4: Pride and Prejudice at the theatre

Extract from the 2024 stage script by Rob Brannen.

5. Bingley's House Party

The ensemble gather in party mode and Bingley announces.

Bingley: Welcome! Welcome! There's drinks and buffet in the kitchen... help yourselves! And if anyone wants to dance now's the time to bust some moves at the Bingley's! Let's warm this house!

Everybody dances. Lizzy enters and weaves her way in and out of the dancers looking for Wickham. Charlotte and Jane come out of the dance and meet her.

Charlotte: Looking for someone? Perhaps someone who you've been texting me about all week?

Jane: She's obsessed with him!

Lizzy: *(anxiously)* Looks like he's not here yet...

(Denny drops out of the dance and turns to them.)

Lizzy: Denny! Gee here yet?

Denny: Ah, tough one but Gee messaged us to say he's got another gig. Bigger and better I spose. Gorra follow the money like. That, and I got the feeling there was someone here he wanted to avoid. *(He re-joins the dance)*

Lizzy: *(to Charlotte)* That Darcy is poison, anyone half-decent avoids him. Just ruined my evening.

Jane: We don't know who to believe. When I quizzed Bingley he said he didn't know the whole story, but he can vouch for Darcy as a really good friend and since his parents died he's been an amazing brother to his young sister.

Lizzy: Darcy's got a young sister?

Charlotte: Come on Lizzy...not like you. There's a party on...

Lizzy: And fun to be had. You're right... As the man I really wanted to dance with isn't here... I'll happily dance with the next man who asks me!

Colin: *(Who has been lurking)* Lizzy what a pleasant surprise! You promised me a dance remember!

(She pulls a face at Charlotte and is whisked off by Colin.)

Mrs Bennet: Here she is! My lovely little Lydia! Sweet 16 and never been kissed!

(Outbreak of sarcastic coughing amongst sisters and Mr Bennet)

Mrs Bennet: You lot need to get yourselves tested...there's still a lot of it about!

Caroline: Just imagine some poor man having that for a mother-in-law. Making such a show of herself all the time. It would be excruciating; don't you think Darcy.

Darcy: Fortunately, I have no plans to marry into that family or any other.

(Lydia and Kitty pass by with a raucous laugh holding on to each other)

Caroline: And look out how she's dragged up her girls! Would anyone really want to be associated with them! What a family!

(Caroline moves on leaving Darcy standing awkwardly alone. Sick Boy enters and tells him...)

Sick Boy: Big sick house! Big sick garden! Sick car out front! Proper sick man! Proper Sick!

(Sick Boy moves on. Lizzy grabs Charlotte and escapes from the dance with Colin)

Lizzy: *(laughing together)* Possibly the worst start to any party in my life!

Charlotte: Come on, Colin's not that bad!

Lizzy: Oh, he is! Anyone's got to be a more fun dance partner than Colin! *(she turns to see Darcy who has approached them)*. Oh!

Darcy: I er...don't have anyone to dance with... wondered if you would... with me... er...dance?

(Lizzy looks at Charlotte horrified.)

Charlotte: Go ahead. *(She backs away, smirking at Lizzy and leaves them)*

(They are about to dance together when Connell approaches)

Connell: Well, you two can't leave each other alone I see. No wonder whenever I see you Darcy, you're in the company of this lovely young lady. Lizzy, isn't it? Someone's obviously fallen under your spell! *(Darcy is mortified and Connell sees this)*. Uh-oh perhaps I shouldn't have said that!

Lizzy: *(as a dig at Darcy)* Say all you want. I always enjoy the company of someone who likes to talk. It makes for good company and fun!

Connell: I've always found Darcy good company. A good friend and a wonderful

brother to Georgia. No sign of her tonight?

Darcy: She might be down later. Aren't all 16-year-olds awkward and shy?

(Lydia, Kitty and Denny walk across)

Denny: He shouted, 'Full Moon's out tonight lads!' and it was all over insta before he had a chance to pull his kex up!' *(Lydia and Kitty guffaw, snort, and exit).*

Darcy: *(to Connell)* We were about to...[dance]

Connell: You, Darcy?! I've never known you want to dance in your entire... Uh-oh, perhaps I shouldn't have said that!

(He bows out and leaves them to begin their uncomfortable dance together.)

Lizzy: Do you like this music?

Darcy: Indeed. I ... most pleasant.

Lizzy: I think it's your turn to speak now. You could talk about Bingley's house or the great welcome he's had in the town or my top... do you like my outfit, Darcy? Chose it specially for tonight.

Darcy: It's a... it's a ... erm... very well-chosen outfit. I like your top... and er... your bottom... *(she laughs)* ... erm... I mean... the whole outfit.

Lizzy: That'll do for now. Don't strain yourself. You don't want to pull a vocal cord cos I've already put your name down for karaoke. *(He looks horrified, and she laughs)* I'm kidding!

Darcy: Do you always talk while you are dancing?

Lizzy: Forget it. If you want to do silence, I can do silence.

(The up-tempo music changes to a slow dance number and, looking round to see everyone else pairing up, they are forced to move in for an uneasy clinch of a romantic song.)

Darcy: Do you and your sisters walk into town very often?

Lizzy: We do. When you saw us, we had just met and got to know a really nice guy. The very talented, Gee Wickham.

Darcy: Gee Wickham is very capable of using his charm to make friends, whether he can keep them is another matter entirely.

Lizzy: He has been so unlucky to lose your friendship and in a way which he said was really cruel and caused a lot of suffering.

(Darcy stops abruptly)

Lizzy: I think we have a lot in common you know.

Darcy: Really?

Lizzy: I don't think you want to speak to me, and, in exactly the same way, I don't want to speak to you either. It's obvious that you hate dancing and particularly with me. I don't know who put you up to this dare of asking me to dance but you've probably had your fun now...

Darcy: There was no... *(He struggles for words and leaves.)*

(She dances alone for a moment looking around her self-consciously. Then her phone gets a message notification)

Lizzy: *(as she goes to look at her phone)* The sarcasm! That guy, honestly!

(Wickham appears as he reads his message out he slowly dances with her, a warm, enjoyable dance in her mind.)

Wickham: Hi. It's me. SO glad I got your number when we met. Really wanted to see you tonight but the closer it got the thought of seeing Darcy was doing my head in. Being at the same party with him for hours would be torture!

Lizzy: *(to herself)* I know what you mean!

Wickham: Then I thought after a few drinks, he might make a scene and things could turn nasty and so didn't want to end up spoiling the night for everyone. Pity though. Was looking forward to seeing you again. Been thinking about you.

Lizzy and Wickham: *(They part from the dance and reading the message at the same time)* Heart emoji. Kiss.

(Wickham goes.)

Lizzy: 'Heart emoji. Kiss.' Nice one.

(Lydia and Kitty run on in excitement)

Lydia and Kitty: Dad's been drinking! Dad's been drinking!

Lizzy: What?! Dad never drinks!

Lydia and Kitty: Not since he...

Lizzy: ... with the...

Lizzy, Lydia and Kitty: on his... all about his...

Lizzy: *(suddenly remembering)* Oh my God! He's not brought it with him has he?!

(Enter Mr Bennet. He 'grooves' on, across the space.)

Mr Bennet: I appear to have lost your mother... *(as in the song)* That's the way -aha
aha- I like it - aha aha. *(Mrs Bennet enters.)* Oh, there you are, my gorgeous! *(Singing)*
I'm just your teenage dirtbag baby!

Mrs Bennet: You can put your dirtbag out the back with the bins, because... Silence
everyone! Silence! Our Mary's going to sing a song!

Mr Bennet, Jane, Lizzy, Kitty & Lydia: Nooooooooooooooooooooo!!!!

