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Pride and Prejudice

Lesson 3: The Proposals

Lesson Plan and Resources

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Pride and Prejudice

Lesson 3: The Marriage Proposals

Clip Resources

How film and television adaptations have approached the presentation of Mr Collins' and Darcy's proposals to Elizabeth

Main Adaptation:
Pride and Prejudice (1995)

Adapted by Andrew Davies; produced by Sue Birtwistle.

Collins' Proposal: [▶ Watch here](#) 

Darcy's Proposal: [▶ Watch here](#) 

Darcy's Letter: [▶ Watch here](#) 

Secondary Adaptation:
Pride and Prejudice (2005)

Adapted by Deborah Moggach; directed by Joe Wright.

Collins' Proposal: [▶ Watch here](#) 

Darcy's Proposal: [▶ Watch here](#) 

Darcy's Letter: [▶ 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:

This lesson focuses on two separate incidents in the novel where Elizabeth Bennet receives a proposal. Mr Collins' proposal occurs in Chapter 19, the day after the Netherfield Ball where he has danced so disastrously with Elizabeth and embarrassed the Bennets by introducing himself to Mr Darcy. Next morning, Mrs Bennet insists that Elizabeth has a private talk with Collins and she is embarrassed to hear his three reasons, so studiously rehearsed, for wishing to marry her – a clergyman should marry; he feels it will bring him great happiness; and Lady Catherine desires him to marry a sensible, practical young woman. A fourth reason is that he feels it just to marry a daughter of Mr Bennet because of the entail. Only then does he assure Elizabeth of his own ardent feelings which are just as mannered as the rest of his proposal. She rejects him saying she is the last woman who could ever make him happy and then tries again to put him off before leaving the room where Mr Collins remains, sure that this is a mere temporary refusal.

Darcy's proposal and his letter occur in Chapters 34 to 36 which are immediately preceded by Elizabeth learning from Colonel Fitzwilliam that it is Darcy who has put a stop to the potential marriage between Bingley and Jane. Elizabeth has a headache and so does not go to Rosings and instead Darcy turns up at Hunsford parsonage and bursts out with his proposal. Elizabeth is momentarily flattered but then angered by his comments about the differences in their social standing and how he is proposing despite himself. She rejects him, hurt by his slights against her family, accusing him of preventing her sister's happiness and of doing wrong by Wickham. He is the last man she could marry. Next day he meets her out walking and hands her his letter of explanation. She reads it immediately, still disgusted by his actions in parting Jane and Bingley, which he insists he did for the best, and then reveals the deeply morally flawed nature of Wickham and his botched elopement with the young Georgiana Darcy. Elizabeth sees how wrong she has been about Wickham, and also regrets her own family's poor social behaviour. She begins to revise her opinions of Darcy.

In Chapter 58, when Darcy repropose, they talk of the lessons they both learnt from his initial attempt and from the writing and reading of the letter.

Starting Points

Pre-reading option

Illustrations of Mr Collins' proposal to Elizabeth have not changed much over time. Share the picture by Hugh Thomson from an 1894 illustrated edition *Pride and Prejudice* in **Resource 3.1**. Ask students to make notes around this as to what they observe about the setting. Then compare this with the screen grabs from the 1980, 1995 and 2005 adaptations. How do the ways that characters are positioned reflect their social status? What similarities and differences can they identify?

Post-reading option

Once students have read both the Collins and Darcy proposals, focus on the context of the latter stages of Georgian courtship. During this period, it would have been much more common for a proposal to be made via a letter than in person. Often the composition of this would have involved the input of a parent. The clip from the podcast *You're Dead to me: Georgian courtship* offers some great context on this topic [from 11:35-13:32 in the podcast].

Revision option

Ask students to look again at Mr Collins' reaction to Elizabeth's first rejection of him as a deferral of her acceptance – the 'delicate' behaviour of an 'elegant female'. Then invite them to consider Elizabeth's rejection of Darcy and eventual acceptance of him. Consider what comes in-between his two proposals to make her change her mind and bring about development of her character. Make a stepping-stone timeline of these events using **Resource 3.2**.

Main Activities

Mr Collins' reasonable proposal ([click here to launch the digital tool](#))

Ask students to examine Mr Collins's as a pragmatic proposal. Why then is it so ridiculous and insupportable to Elizabeth – how does Austen convey this? How do the adaptations portray it and with what effect? e.g. it is all style and no substance. It is pre-rehearsed, some of it is verbatim Lady Catherine, revealing a lack of any true feeling. Evidence of this is relayed in the narrative by his immediate proposal to Charlotte.

Play the 1995 and 2005 clips that correspond to this activity and Chapter 19. This will demonstrate how the dialogue and free-indirect narrative work together to allow students to consider how Elizabeth responds to her cousin's proposal.

Students could also watch the clip from *Pride and Prejudice: From Page to Screen* where Sue Birtwistle, producer of the 1995 television adaptation, explains how Jane Austen understands the realities of being a woman in Georgian times ([watch clip here](#)).

Darcy's unconventional proposal ([click here to launch the digital tool](#))

Darcy's proposal balances substance with style. In Elizabeth's view initially 'He spoke well' (Ch. 34) but he expresses his feelings - directly and emotively. They are against the formal conventions that Collins uses and highlight the great difference in the couple's social ranks. Play the 1995 and 2005 clips that correspond to this activity and Chapter 34. Invite students to look closely at the dialogue and the free-indirect narrative – how these inter-play and show how Darcy's impudent honesty also allows Elizabeth to respond uncivilly and step outside marriage refusal conventions.

Reading and rereading Darcy's letter ([click here to launch the digital tool](#))

Discuss with the importance of the letter as:

- a place where the reader / Elizabeth hear the voice of Darcy at length for the first time
- a tangible record of Darcy's feelings and arguments that Elizabeth can read and digest
- a personal document that she keeps to herself

Next trace the emotional journey that Elizabeth takes as she reads the letter in Chapters 35 and 36, using **Resource 3.3**. Elicit from students why Austen splits the letter over two chapters like this? Then link to activity in the digital tool to consider with students the ways in which the 1995 and 2005 adaptations portray how Elizabeth reads the letter.

Character and performance: proposal emotions

Students divide into groups of 4 labelled either Group 1 or 2. Groups 1 – two group members act out the lines of dialogue from the Collins proposal while the other two circle describing the emotions being felt by the couple – using the free-indirect narrative from Chapter 19. Groups 2 – enact the dialogue and interpret the narrative from the Darcy proposal from Chapter 34. In the adaptations, students can reflect on how Jennifer Ehle (1995) and Keira Knightley (2005) as Elizabeth interpret these in each proposal as well as Colin Firth/ Matthew Macfayden as Darcy and David Bamber/Tom Hollander as Mr Collins.

Students could be asked to write a director's note to the actor playing Elizabeth, Darcy or Mr Collins in each adaptation suggesting alternative ways in which they might react.

Creative writing – Letters of proposal

It is likely that Mr Collins' proposal originated as a letter in Austen's original version of the novel – *First Impressions* – which it is thought was a purely epistolary novel. Ask students either to rewrite Mr Collins' proposal as a letter or a letter in response to Mr Collins from Elizabeth in which she puts forward her formal reasons for rejecting him. Both letters should refer closely to Chapter 19.

Letters can then be shared in pairs with one student reading the proposal and the other the rejection. (Letter starters **Resources 3.4 and 3.5**.)



Extensions

Money and rank: – Darcy’s frankness during his proposal about the inequalities between his status and Elizabeth’s form the fundamental basis of societal objections to their match. Ask students to re-read his proposal and Elizabeth’s rebuttal again in this light. For him the match is about what he might have to give up because of this barrier; for her, his attack is personal. Invite students to collect key quotations to illustrate their attitudes on this, such as:

Darcy:

‘His sense of her inferiority--of its being a degradation--of the family obstacles which judgement had always opposed to inclination’
‘Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? To congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?’

Elizabeth:

‘you chose to tell me that you liked me against your will, against your reason, and even against your character’
‘your manners impressing me with the fullest belief of your arrogance, your conceit, and your selfish disdain of the feelings of others, were such as to form that ground-work of disapprobation... I felt that you were the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry’

The return of the letter – When it comes to the re-proposal in Chapter 58, the letter forms a large part of the discussion between Elizabeth and Darcy – further evidence that it proved a huge watershed in their understanding of one another and Austen’s development of their relationship. Ask students to annotate the extracts from this discussion in Resource 3.7 to show what was learnt on either side from the letter. Students might also consider why this is omitted from the 1995 and 2005 adaptations.

Drama – Imagine that Elizabeth did marry Mr Collins. Write a monologue, five years into the marriage, in which she describes her daily life and reflects on how she feels about being Mrs Collins. There is plenty of evidence for the kind of life that she would lead in Charlotte’s explanation of her daily routine in Chapter 28 that students can respond to and adapt.

Students could take it in turn to deliver their monologues to the class, in character.

Language (Click here to launch digital tool) –

Conduct a comparative analysis of the vocabulary used by Elizabeth and Darcy in Chapters 34-36, using the free word search (Control F) in the digital tool:

Invite students to try scanning the text for ‘civility/incivility’, ‘gentleman-like’, ‘propriety/impropriety’ and ‘unjust’ for a start. Are they surprised by the outcome – that Elizabeth and Darcy are using many of the same moralistic words to or about each other? Discuss whether this indicates that the couple have more values in common than they believe they have at this stage.

Setting – Where Darcy proposes and how it is framed in the novel, the 1995 and 2005 adaptations make for interesting insights into how the characters are perceived and are thinking and feeling. For example:

The novel: at Hunsford parsonage

1995: setting matches the Hunsford parsonage drawing room of the novel

- As Darcy proposes: Elizabeth is framed by a wedding veil-like curtain in the window behind her
- Darcy backs himself into the corner of the room that is already too small from him; a visual metaphor for being forced into expressing his feelings

2005: outdoor setting at grand garden temple – reminds audience of the social difference between the couple

- The rain soaks both of them – a dampener on Darcy’s feelings (pathetic fallacy); also reveals their physiques
- At the end the camera pans out, the parkland of Rosings makes Elizabeth look very small

Students can record their own comparisons the chart in **Resource 3.6**.

Glossary

From Chapter 19

Diffidence - lack of self-confidence

Observances - customs/conventions

Vexed - annoyed

Injunction - order

Diversion - distraction

Purport - meaning/purpose

Matrimony - marriage

Patroness - female sponsor

Quadrille - a trick-based card game for four people

Vivacity - liveliness

Reproach - blame/criticise

Amiable - agreeable

Delicacy - refined quality

Manifold - many/numerous

No pretension - don't aspire to/seek

Sanctioned - enforced

Coquetry - flirty behaviour

From Chapter 34

Exasperate - annoy intensely

Serenity - peace

Consolation - comfort

Ardently - strongly/passionately

Avowal - formal declaration (of love)

Inclination - natural preference

Insensible - unaware/indifferent

Countenance - facial expression

Provocations - actions that provoke anger

Censure - strong disapproval

Caprice - sudden change of mind/mood

Derision - contempt/ridicule

Indignation - feeling of strong displeasure

Remorse - guilt/regret

Recital - spoken account

Scruples - moral principles

Unalloyed - pure

Abhorrence - extreme disgust

Condition - social rank

Incredulity - disbelief

Mortification - extreme humiliation

Tumult - emotional agitation

Gratifying - pleasantly satisfying

Assurance - certainty/confidence

Glossary (continued)

From Chapter 35

Turnpike - a toll road

Paling - fence

Verdure - lush green leaves

Haughty - proud

Grove - small group of trees and bushes

Magnitude - great size/significance

Defiance of - strong disregard for

Wantonly - cruelly

Depravity - act of moral corruption

Attentively - paying full attention

Repugnant - disgusting/strongly off-putting

Inducement - incentive/motive

Remonstrance - objection

I condescended - lowered myself

Refute - deny it is true

Veracity - truthfulness/honesty

Vicious - immoral

Propensities - tendencies/behaviours

Unfolding - revealing

Living - appointment to a church parish for life

Pecuniary - financial

Accede - agree

Dissipation - excessive indulgence

Incumbent - person currently in a job

Obtruded - imposed/forced upon

Presided over - managed/ran

Connivance - secretly co-operating

Imprudence - lack of judgement

Testimony - statement taken as proof

Executor - person responsible for a deceased person's will being carried out

From Chapter 36

Contrariety - contradicting/opposing

Penitent - feeling regret

Cherished - most dear/most valued

Perturbed - disturbed/troubled

Impartiality - being unbiased/fairness

Profligacy - reckless extravagance

Integrity - honesty/having strong principles

Approbation - approval/praise

Corroboration - giving supporting evidence

Indelicacy - inappropriate way

Mercenary - driven by money

Mediocrity - average nature

Absurd - extremely foolish

Discernment - ability to distinguish/make good judgements

Candour - honest behaviour

Prepossession - impression formed without experience

Fervent - having intensity or feeling

Alluded - referred to/hinted at

Materially - significantly

Pride and Prejudice

Resources for Lesson 3

Resource 3.1: Mr Collins' proposal at Longbourn

- Note down what you notice about the setting in the first illustration
- Look carefully at each picture and make a note of any similarities and differences in the room settings



1894 edition of the novel, Hugh Thomson



2005, Moggach/Wright



1980, Fay Weldon



Episode 2 1995, Davies/Birtwistle

Similarities/differences in the settings:

Resource 3.2: Timeline for Elizabeth's change of mind

Along the path marked below, note key events that change Elizabeth's mind about Darcy and lead to her accepting his proposal.

Note where place they happen, and how they make Elizabeth feel, in a few words. You should be able to come up with a further 5 or 6 steps along the way.

Chapter 34: Elizabeth's rejection of Darcy's proposal at Hunsford
She feels angry and hurt

Chapters 35 and 36: Reading Darcy's letter in Rosings Park
Angry at his parting Bingley and Jane
Humiliated that she misread Wickham and about her family's behaviour

Chapter 58: Darcy's renewed proposal at Longbourn
Happiness at finding they share a deep affection for one another and can forgive their faults

Resource 3.4: Mr Collins' letter of proposal to Elizabeth

Using Mr Collins' proposal speeches in Chapter 19, write the formal letter he might have written to Elizabeth instead.

It might start like this:

My dear Miss Elizabeth,

I am sure that my attentions to you during my visit cannot have gone unnoticed. Relating to which I am now writing to you on what I believe will prove a joyful subject.

My reasons for coming to Longbourn...

Resource 3.5: Elizabeth's letter of rejection to Mr Collins

Using Elizabeth's speeches to Mr Collins and thoughts to herself in Chapter 19, write the formal letter she might have written to rejecting his proposal.

It might start like this:

My dear Sir,

Further to our most unfortunate discussion this morning, I felt I should write to confirm my reasons for not accepting your very well-intended offer of marriage.

I would like to start by...

Resource 3.6: Comparing Darcy-Elizabeth proposal settings

Re-read the extract where Darcy proposes taking detail of where it happens. Then watch the scene from the 1995 and 2005 adaptations.

Add your thoughts in the table below, considering the effect of weather, lighting and props as well as the setting.

Novel (Chapter 34)	1995 proposal setting and its effects	2005 proposal setting and its effects
Indoor	Indoor – claustrophobic; Darcy hemmed in	Outdoor – sense of space making characters seem small
Hunsford parsonage	Hunsford parsonage – same setting as novel – privacy as no one else his home	Rosings Park – place the couple outside but still give them privacy

Resource 3.7 Elizabeth and Darcy return to the letter

Read this extract from where the Darcy and Elizabeth explain the effect of the letter on them.

Make notes around the letter to show the lessons that each of them learnt about themselves and each other from the first proposal and Darcy's letter.

Darcy mentioned his letter. "Did it," said he, "did it soon make you think better of me? Did you, on reading it, give any credit to its contents?"

She explained what its effect on her had been, and how gradually all her former prejudices had been removed.

"I knew," said he, "that what I wrote must give you pain, but it was necessary. I hope you have destroyed the letter. There was one part especially, the opening of it, which I should dread your having the power of reading again. I can remember some expressions which might justly make you hate me."

"The letter shall certainly be burnt, if you believe it essential to the preservation of my regard; but, though we have both reason to think my opinions not entirely unalterable, they are not, I hope, quite so easily changed as that implies."

"When I wrote that letter," replied Darcy, "I believed myself perfectly calm and cool, but I am since convinced that it was written in a dreadful bitterness of spirit."

"The letter, perhaps, began in bitterness, but it did not end so. The adieu is charity itself. But think no more of the letter. The feelings of the person who wrote, and the person who received it, are now so widely different from what they were then, that every unpleasant circumstance attending it, ought to be forgotten. You must learn some of my philosophy. Think only of the past as its remembrance gives you pleasure."

...

You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was proper humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You shewed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased.

"Had you then persuaded yourself that I should?"

"Indeed I had. What will you think of my vanity? I believed you to be wishing, expecting my addresses."

"My manners must have been in fault, but not intentionally I assure you. I never meant to deceive you, but my spirits might often lead me wrong. How you must have hated me after that evening?"

"Hate you! I was angry perhaps at first, but my anger soon began to take a proper direction."