AP English Literature

*Pride & Prejudice* Essay

**Any research you use must be from a previously published source. You will generally not find this kind of essay easily on the Internet. You will find critical essays, however, in databases (Gale Literary Resource) and at the library. I will show you how to access the databases!**

**Be advised that no other kinds of research should be incorporated into your essay.**

**Spark Notes, Bookrags, etc. are not considered reliable academic sources.**

Essay Requirements:

* 5-8 pages
* An original, clear thesis statement
* Documented critical support (use at least two critical essays or books)
* Several direct quotes from the literary text (deal *closely* with Austen’s language!)
* An integrated discussion of literary techniques/elements as is germane to your examples and thesis
* Organic (emancipated) structuring (i.e. your topic determines the organization of your paragraphs – you are not trying to fit a square peg in a round hole).
* Precise MLA format
* Carefully proofread and polished prose

TIP: After you write your essay, proofread it for unnecessary words and phrases. Go through it and take out any word that, if removed, does not affect the overall meaning of the sentence. Don’t waste words. Don’t use flowery language.

Remember in an essay of this kind, your goal is to take meaning that is *implicit* in a literary work and make it *explicit*. In order to elucidate the text for your reader, you must be mindful of diction and sentence structure.

**\*\*Should you have an idea you wish to pursue that is separate from what you see below, see me or write me an email explaining it. I encourage you to find a topic that interests you and pursue it.**

Essay Ideas:

1. Does Austen seek to change social and/or political attitudes and traditions? What are those attitudes and traditions, exactly? Why does Austen wish for change? What techniques does she use to influence her readers’ views? Are they effective?
2. In questioning the value of literary realism, Flannery O’Connor has written, “I am interested in making a good cause for distortion because I am coming to believe that it is the only way to make people see.” Write an essay in which you “make a good cause for distortion,” as distinct from literary realism. Apply this idea to your examination of *Pride and Prejudice* in which several characters are distorted in order to “make people see.” Connect this idea to the “comedy of manners.”

1. Although not an epistolary novel, *Pride and Prejudice* contains many letters, some of which affect the plot in a crucial way. Trace *Pride and Prejudice’s* connection to the tradition of the epistolary novel and examine Austen’s use of letters. (This should involve researching that tradition.) Be sure to analyze the tone, diction, and style of the letters you choose to examine. If you choose this essay, you must posit a reason for Austen’s choice of letters as a plot device and evaluate the role of letters in conveying theme.
2. “Some feminist critics such as Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* argue that, ‘Austen dramatizes how damaging it has been for women to inhabit a culture created by and for men’ (120); others, including Julie Shaffer, suggest that Austen allows for the personal growth of the heroine while empowering her within the marriage plot. Although detractors conclude the heroine's marriage ultimately supports the patriarchal institution of marriage and portrays female submission to male domination, fans praise Austen's portrayal of ‘modern marriage,’ a union of equal partners.”

Where do you stand on the issue of a feminist reading of *Pride and Prejudice*? Read some critical essays on the topic and take and prove your position.

1. Examine how Austen’s choices regarding narrative structure (including letters) and point-of-view (including “free indirect discourse”) enhance theme and contribute to the novel’s meaning.

**Emancipate Your Essay!**

Let’s talk about the structure of your essays. An essay’s form should depend on the ideas that need to be expressed and supported. Take the five-paragraph essay, for example. In this type of essay, the thesis is relatively simple and is supported by three paragraphs in which the ideas expressed weigh equally. They are all serving the purpose of supporting the thesis.

A more interesting and sophisticated format for an essay is one in which the thesis is complex and some paragraphs are written **to support an idea that supports the thesis**. In a complex essay like this, some paragraphs do not directly support the thesis; instead, they support a supporting idea. See what I mean?

COMPARE THE TWO DIFFERENT OUTLINES BELOW:

CLASSIC FIVE PARAGRAPH ORGANIZATION

I. Thesis with Three Parts

 II. Idea One

 III. Idea Two

 IV. Idea Three

V. Conclusion

# EMANCIPATED OR “ORGANIC” ORGANIZATION

***Let the organization and Number of paragraphs grow out of the topic! (ONE Example Below)***

I. Complex Thesis

 II. Idea One

 III. Idea Two

 A. Idea Three (building on idea two)

 III. Idea Four

 a. Idea Five (building on idea four)

VII. Conclusion

As you develop as a writer, you need to be able to break free from the constraints of the five paragraph format, but you need to do it in a way that is both creative and logical. Again, let the purpose of your essay guide your writing and the form of your paper.