CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

Emma

Jane Austen · *1815* · *original English text*

A clever girl, rich and a little too sure of her judgment, spends a year arranging other people's lives and almost ruins her own. Austen's comedy is exact and merciful: the humiliation at Box Hill is deserved, the repentance is real, and the right marriage is the one that has been telling Emma the truth all along.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Can a mind that loves to manage others learn to see clearly—beginning with itself?

"It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!"
narrator · Volume III, Chapter XI

Emma's harm is not cruelty so much as unexamined cleverness: she steers Harriet, misreads Jane and Frank, and wounds Miss Bates in public. Mr. Knightley's rebuke is the book's needed medicine. Self-knowledge, once it comes, makes gratitude, amendment and a just love possible.

KEY CHARACTERS

Emma Woodhouse
cleverness in need of humility

Mr. Knightley
truth-telling love

Harriet Smith
pliable affection, easily led

Jane Fairfax
reserve covering a hard secret

Frank Churchill
charm used as cover

Miss Bates
humble, talkative, easily wounded

Mr. Woodhouse
gentle invalid; a claim on Emma's duty

Mrs. Elton
a parody of Emma's worst manners

Robert Martin
the worthy match first refused

A LOVER'S PLAINNESS

"If I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more."
Mr. Knightley · Volume III, Chapter XIII

Grades 9–12
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01
Handsome, Clever, and Rich
VOLUME I, CHAPTERS I–VIII
A vacancy in the house, and a new scheme of patronage.

- Emma Woodhouse, mistress of Hartfield since her sister and then her governess married, wants a project
- She takes up pretty, pliant **Harriet Smith** and talks her out of the yeoman Robert Martin
- She imagines a match with the vicar, Mr. Elton
- Mr. **Knightley**, the neighbor who may speak frankly to her, already disapproves

> *"Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence"*
> **narrator** · Volume I, Chapter I

02
The Elton Disaster
VOLUME I, CHAPTERS IX–XVIII
The first plot collapses, and not gently.

- Emma paints Harriet; Mr. Elton's attentions are taken for interest in the sitter
- In the carriage he proposes to Emma herself; she is astonished and indignant
- Harriet is wounded; Emma begins, a little, to see her own interference
- News of Jane Fairfax, and of the lively Frank Churchill who is soon to visit, opens a new field for guessing

03
Newcomers
VOLUME II
Frank, Jane, and a wife for Elton: Highbury grows more crowded, not more clear.

- The new Mrs. Elton arrives, loud with her own importance
- Frank Churchill charms Highbury and flirts, to Emma's pleasure, with Emma herself
- Jane Fairfax's reserve irritates her; she invents a slanderous story about Jane and a married man
- Harriet, encouraged again, begins to hope elsewhere—Emma does not yet ask where

04
Box Hill
VOLUME III, CHAPTERS I–VII
A day of wit that becomes a public unkindness.

- The strawberry party at Donwell, and the outing to Box Hill, gather all the frictions of the book
- Frank's spirits are feverish; Emma, flattered into showing off, makes a cruel joke at Miss Bates
- Mr. Knightley meets her afterward with a rebuke she cannot laugh away
- The next morning she goes to the Bateses in shame; Jane will not be easily soothed

> *"It was badly done, indeed!"*
> **Mr. Knightley** · Volume III, Chapter VII

05
The Arrow
VOLUME III, CHAPTERS VIII–XI
Secrets break, and Emma learns what she wants—too late, she fears.

- Jane's distress and Mrs. Churchill's death bring the hidden engagement of Jane and Frank to light
- Emma has to tell Harriet the truth, and hears a worse one: Harriet hopes for Mr. Knightley
- The thought that he must marry no one but herself comes like an arrow
- She sees, in the same instant, her own conduct and her own heart

> *"It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!"*
> **narrator** · Volume III, Chapter XI

06
Amendment
VOLUME III, CHAPTERS XII–XIX
Truth spoken in time, and a house set in better order.

- Mr. Knightley, meaning to comfort her, offers himself; she is able, at last, to hear him
- Harriet is gently led back toward Robert Martin, and this time the match is right
- Jane and Frank are forgiven their secrecy; Mrs. Elton remains herself
- The marriage will take Knightley to Hartfield while Emma's father lives—a last kindness that also mends a household

Self-knowledge | Humility | Truth-telling | Kindness | Right Marriage | Repentance

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. The first sentence names blessings that can become snares: handsomeness, cleverness, riches, and a life with little to vex it.
2. Mr. Knightley's authority in the book comes from his willingness to oppose Emma for her good. Compare his tone with Mrs. Elton's.
3. "Badly done, indeed!" is not about a failed scheme; it is about a joke told downward, at a poor unmarried woman. Why is that the moral center of the outing?
4. Emma's imagination about Jane and Frank is not harmless fancy. Track the harm of a story she has no right to tell.
5. The arrow of self-knowledge in Volume III, Chapter XI arrives with jealousy, and then with shame. Both are used; neither is left to rule.
6. The ending is comic, and it is also an amendment of life. What, practically, does Emma have to give up in order to be happy?

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #158, Emma, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/emma/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.