

**Mothers in Jane Austen's Novels**  
**Discussion Guide: January 12, 2019**

**Background:**

- Regency Era norms and expectations for mothers
- Jane's experiences and observations

**High Level Observations across the novels:**

- None of the living mothers of the heroines seem to be adequate.
  - Peripheral "good" mothers: Mrs. Harville, Mrs. Gardiner
- The substitute mothers are little better, and the better ones are flawed.
  - Exceptions: Mrs. Gardiner and Mrs. Croft
- Heroines are isolated from their mothers (and fathers), and somehow establish their values and character on their own.
  - Most of the novels take place when daughters are of age to leave their parents; *Mansfield Park* begins with heroine as child and ends with her as a young woman.
  - All heroines choose marriage and to be future mothers

**Discussion Questions:**

- How do mothers in the novels contribute to the plots?
- From how Jane wrote about mothers in the novels, what does Jane want us to know? What is she communicating? What makes an ideal mother? Is she providing a social commentary?
- If integrity was lacking in the 3 Ward sisters in *Mansfield Park*, how does Fanny have integrity?
- How did Mrs. Morland's motherhood influence Catherine positively or negatively?
- Why were Jane and Elizabeth so different that their younger 3 siblings since they had the same parents?
- With all of the different types of mothers and substitute mothers in *Sense and Sensibility*, what were the key messages on motherhood from Jane?
- Emma seemed to have raised herself and somehow learned to manage an estate (we assume). She did not like to read, we suspect she did not learn much from Anna Weston. How did she learn? Who provided her education and moral education?
- What is Jane communicating about the different mothering styles of Mrs. Harville, Mrs. Musgrove, and Mary Musgrove?
- All heroines choose marriage and, by extension, motherhood. What kind of mothers will they become?
- What can we infer about Jane Austen's experiences, observations from what she has written - or not written - about mothers?
- Are Jane's observations on mothers and motherhood relevant today?
- Any other thoughts or observations to share?

## **Resources:**

Mothers, Substitute Mothers, and Daughters in the Novels of Jane Austen by Mary Margaret Benson <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/printed/number11/benson.htm>

Are We Ready for New Directions? Jane Austen's The History of England & Cassandra's Portraits by Annette Upfal and Christine Alexander  
<http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol30no2/upfal-alexander.html>

The Monstrous Mothers of Mansfield Park by Marily Francus  
<http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol35no1/francus.html>

Motherhood and Reality in Northanger Abby by Elvira Casal  
<http://www.jasna.org/assets/Persuasions/No.-20/casal.pdf>

Little Women at Longbourn: The Rewriting of Pride and Prejudice by Sally B. Palmer  
<http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol27no2/palmer.htm>

Reversal of Gender Roles in Persuasion by Joshua J. Masters  
<http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/printed/number15/masters.htm>

Temper Tantrums and Sugar Plums: Childish Behavior in Sense and Sensibility by Katherine Elizabeth Curtis <http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol32no1/curtis.html>

Lady Susan: The Wicked Mother in Jane Austen's Novels by Barbara J. Horwitz  
<http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/printed/number9/horwitz.htm>

Family Patterns in Persuasion by Alice Hufstader  
<http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/printed/number6/hufstader.htm>

## **Parenting/Mothers in Regency England**

"Woman's Place" in Jane Austen's England 1770-1820 by Barbara W. Swords  
<http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/printed/number10/swords.htm>

Mistress of the Manor: Full-time Working Mom or Lady of Leisure? By Maria Grace  
<http://randombitsoffascination.com/portfolio/mistress-of-the-manor-lady-of-leisure-or-full-time-working-mom/>

Brief essays on motherhood in Romantic Period by Julia McLeod:

- Mothers in the Romantic Period: Delight, Duty and Danger  
<http://web.utk.edu/~gerard/romanticpolitics/motherhood.html>
- A Woman's Power: Pregnancy and Childbirth in the Romantic Era  
<http://web.utk.edu/~gerard/romanticpolitics/womanspower.html>
- Ideas on the Importance of Breastfeeding  
<http://web.utk.edu/~gerard/romanticpolitics/breastfeeding.html>

- Mother's Duty: Fostering Future Citizens of the British Empire  
<http://web.utk.edu/~gerard/romanticpolitics/mothersduty.html>
- The "Dangerously Good" Romantic Mother  
<http://web.utk.edu/~gerard/romanticpolitics/goodmother.html>
- The "Naturally Bad" Romantic Mother  
<http://web.utk.edu/~gerard/romanticpolitics/badmother.html>

The Georgian Guide to Perfect Parenting by Elizabeth Foyster

<https://www.historyextra.com/period/georgian/the-georgian-guide-to-perfect-parenting/>

Book Review: Parenting in England 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity, and Generation

<https://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1318>

Jane Austen's World Blog <https://janeaustensworld.wordpress.com/tag/regency-families/>

- Children were expected soon after marriage consummated.
- Chance of a woman dying in childbirth at that time was 20%.
- Jane's mother bore 8 children and survived.
- The wives of Jane's brothers Edward and Frank both died in childbirth with 11th child.

Jane Austen's Mother/Family Relationships

Jane Austen Info Blog

<http://janeastheninfo.wixsite.com/blog/single-post/2016/03/06/Cassandra-Leigh-Jane-Austens-mother-and-representations-of-mothers-in-her-novels>