

**Sanditon Preparation  
For March 8, 2015  
Reading Group Discussion**

The topic for the upcoming Reading Group discussion, scheduled for this upcoming Sunday, March 8, is Jane Austen's final work, *Sanditon*. The discussion leaders will be Jennifer and Sam Snoek-Brown. Please read the following in preparation for the reading group discussion:

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While *Sanditon* is an unfinished novel, comprised of only 12 chapters, there are so many opportunities for rich discussion and so many themes that we could potentially discuss as a group. While Sam and I were discussing the unfinished novel this weekend, within only a few minutes we had listed multiple potential discussion topics, including (but not limited to):

- Health fads and treatments in Jane Austen's time
- Seaside resorts and the commercialism and allure of sea-bathing in Jane Austen's time
- Jane Austen's own failing health at the time of writing *Sanditon*
- The theme of communication -- and miscommunication
- The theme of extreme change represented in *Sanditon* in multiple ways
- Comparisons to other works of Jane Austen
- Speculating what *Sanditon* reveals of Jane Austen's writing if this were the FIRST work of hers you read
- The meaning and importance of "subscription libraries" in society during Jane Austen's time
- Commentary of other novels and authors mentioned in *Sanditon*
- Connections between *Northanger Abbey* and *Sanditon*
- Connections between *Mansfield Park* and *Sanditon*
- The writing and drafting process evident in *Sanditon* -- as well as the editing process of its subsequent publication
- The numerous versions and popularity of the continuations *Sanditon* has spawned

As you can see, there is so much potential represented within so few pages!

**So how to narrow this down to a single discussion?** Sam and I decided to go back to the source -- or rather, the source of *Sanditon*'s initial presentation to the public, which was in 1870 through J.E. Austen-Leigh's memoir of his aunt Jane Austen. In that memoir, in Chapter XIII, Austen-Leigh described the writing of *Sanditon* and included his own personal summary of it, along with substantial excerpts from Austen's text. The full manuscript of *Sanditon* was not published until 1925. (Scroll down to the bottom of this message for links to his memoir online.)

Therefore, Sam and I have pulled out the following **discussion questions/themes** relating to J.E. Austen-Leigh's original introduction of *Sanditon*.

- **What do we make of the title, *Sanditon*?** The nephew refers to *Sanditon* only as "The Last Work," but says it was untitled. The family named it "Sanditon," but some sources indicate Jane Austen's original working title was "The Brothers."

- **Is there any indication as to why Jane Austen began this last work, and why did she set it aside a few months before her death?** The nephew very clearly lays out the start and end dates of Austen's work on *Sanditon*, and uses metaphorical language to describe his own view of why Austen worked on this "last work" while she was ailing: "...it is certain that the mine at which she had so long laboured was not worked out, and that she was still diligently employed in collecting fresh materials from it."
- **Is there a primary heroine?** The nephew states, "...nor was any heroine yet perceptible, who, like Fanny Price, or Anne Elliot, might draw round her the sympathies of the reader."
- **What indications are there of the story's direction?** The nephew states, "... there was scarcely any indication what the course of the story was to be."
- **And finally, what can we, as readers, judge about the work's quality?** The nephew states, "It is more difficult to judge of the quality of a work so little advanced."

For sources and/or further reading, please feel free to explore the following:

- E-text of *Sanditon* available online in multiple formats at <https://archive.org/details/Sanditon>
- E-text of J.E. Austen-Leigh's 1870 memoir available online through [Project Gutenberg](#) (scroll down to Chapter XIII, "The Last Work")
- Links to more info about seabathing, seaside resorts, health issues, etc. relating to *Sanditon* here on the Austenonly website, <http://austenonly.com/about/jane-austens-sanditon/>