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**Instant Austen: Jane Austen at Warp Speed**

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# INSTANT AUSTEN: JANE AUSTEN AT WARP SPEED

ADAPTED BY

*Treanor Baring*

From Jane Austen's classic novels *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Persuasion*.



*Instant Austen: Jane Austen at Warp Speed*  
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## Production Notes

All five books can be performed in the order listed as a “complete” play. Directors may also choose among the books, or choose an individual book to perform as a standalone play. If you are performing the complete show, include the lines in brackets [like this]. If not, omit the lines in brackets.

## Casting

You can do the complete play with a cast of 8 to 12 actors with every actor playing multiple parts. Most programs cast between 10 to 20 and double the smaller roles. If you cast each play separately, it’s upwards of 30 roles. You can also double within each play and rotate the role of narrator. Or, have the same actor play the narrator throughout.

Before each play there is a character description for that specific play.

Gender casting is flexible, although the original source material is binary. Feel free to adapt casting to suit your program.

The source material gender breakdown for each play is:

### **Sense and Sensibility**

4 Females, 4 Males, 1 Any Gender. Total characters: 9.

### **Pride and Prejudice**

5 Females, 4 Males, 1 Any Gender. Total characters: 10.

### **Mansfield Park**

4 Females, 3 Males, 1 Any Gender. Total characters: 8.

### **Emma**

3 Females, 4 Males, 1 Any Gender. Total characters: 8.

### **Northanger Abbey and Persuasion**

4 Females, 4 Males, 1 Any Gender. Total characters: 9.

You may cast according to type (MRS. DASHWOOD can be the same actor as MRS. BENNET for example) or give actors a challenge by doubling parts counter to type, such as the actor who plays MRS. BENNET could then play CATHERINE.

## Setting

All of the plays are meant to be played fast. That means any large or realistic set pieces should be avoided. Think risers, think smaller moveable set pieces, along with a backdrop or screen. The Narrator is onstage for the entire play(s). They should have something that suggests a library setting with a chair, and perhaps a small bookcase. The Narrator has a large book in hand.

## **Staging**

The staging is flexible. You can have actors enter and exit as need be, or you could have actors enter and exit from behind a screen, or you could have characters stay onstage for the entire story. Do what works best for you. If your characters stay onstage, decide if you'll have groupings, if they'll sit or stand, and where onstage they'll remain when not involved with the action. Remember, it's all about speed!

## **Costuming**

Included in each character description is a "color identifier" as a guide to costuming. If you use them, they can be t-shirts, suggested accessories such as scarves, hats or bonnets or jackets. The color identifiers can be especially helpful if you are double casting to help the audience immediately identify the character. If you have the ability to get period costumes, you can incorporate the specific colors into those costumes. Have your costume designer create their own character look book to share.

## **Running Time**

Each piece runs approximately 10 minutes, except for *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion*, which runs approximately 15 minutes.

# Sense and Sensibility

## Casting

4W 4M + 1 Any Gender

- NARRATOR:** Appears in modern dress. Can be seated in a large comfy chair or at a desk in front of a bookshelf.
- HENRY DASHWOOD:** Has physical action, appears very briefly. Accessory: jacket or coat. Color identifier: black.
- MRS. DASHWOOD:** Mother, sweet and kind, emotional. Accessory: bonnet or hat. Color identifier: cream.
- ELINOR DASHWOOD:** Sense. No-nonsense, practical. Accessory: plain shawl or scarf. Color identifier: light blue.
- MARIANNE DASHWOOD:** Sensibility. Emotional, dramatic. Accessory: lacy shawl. Color identifier: pink.
- EDWARD:** Stodgy, serious, shy. Accessory: brown or blue coat. Color identifier: blue.
- COLONEL BRANDON:** Distinguished, serious. Accessory: red uniform coat, brass buttons if possible. Color identifier: red.
- WILLOUGHBY:** Charming rogue. Accessory: fancy period tie or cravat. Color identifier: purple.
- LUCY STEELE:** Sugary sweet but vicious mean girl. Accessory: flashy, feathery shawl. Color identifier: hot pink.

*If you are performing the complete show, include the lines in brackets [like this]. If not, omit the lines in brackets.*

NARRATOR: Welcome to *Instant Austen: Jane Austen at Warp Speed* where we will race through the English writer Jane Austen's [six (or whatever number group performs)] great novels, written in the nineteenth century but still popular. First up, naturally, Miss Austen's first published novel from 1811. This is a no lace, no teacups, no frills redux of Austen's masterpiece of sisters, secrets, and *Sense and Sensibility*. (Sound effect: Opening music. Can be classical. Or use current pop or rock with a theme of secrets) Starting on page one: Meet Mr. Henry Dashwood.

HENRY DASHWOOD: I'm rich, but all the money came from my first wife.

NARRATOR: She passed away, we don't know how.

HENRY DASHWOOD: (waves at audience in a friendly way) I married again, though.

NARRATOR: Don't get too attached. He's gone by page three. But... first he makes his son promise to give his second wife and their daughters some of his inheritance. Because all the cash and Norland Park go to the son. (flips through a large book) blah blah blah, surprise, surprise, son keeps it all and second Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters get zippo, nada, or in Brit-speak (with exaggerated accent) 'naught.' Introducing said second wife, Mrs. Dashwood.

MRS. DASHWOOD: Hi, there. Mrs. Dashwood here.

NARRATOR: She's over forty, which in Jane Austen's time makes her, like really old. So, kinda like an extra.

MRS. DASHWOOD: (looks offended, then defiant) I'll be back. You'll see.

NARRATOR: Now on to our title characters, Mrs. Dashwood's daughters. *Sense and Sensibility*, not their real names, although it's pretty clear by page four which is which. Meet Sense, or Elinor.

ELINOR: Keep calm and carry on, everyone!!

NARRATOR: And now *Sensibility*. Which doesn't mean sensible. It means in the feels. Total Emo. Marianne.

MARIANNE: (putting the back of her hand to her forehead) Woe is me!

NARRATOR: Now, introducing the eligible bachelors. Rule One for eligibility: large fortune, look good riding a horse, and have a ‘well informed mind.’

Also quite importantly, Rule Two, eligible bachelors don’t drive a “barouche,” (*pronounced barOOSH*) which we gather from the text is some kind of fancy carriage that screams ‘stay away from this dude!’

So... Man One: Edward – Elinor and Marianne’s half brother’s wife’s brother, which makes him something like a half-step-brother-brother-in-law or a step-half-brother in-law-once removed, or some other kind of relative you’re allowed to marry.

EDWARD: For the record: I have rejected every career my family wants for me. Basically, I do nothing. Also, in spite of appearing to be quite dull, I have a secret...

NARRATOR: No spoilers!

EDWARD: But mystery is all I’ve got going for me.

NARRATOR: That’s not true. You’re amiable. Which in Austen-speak means you can talk about subjects other than fox-hunting or shooting birds. (*counting off with fingers*) And, Elinor is a bit dull, too. And, you’re respectable. Which means something like “doesn’t pick his nose in public.” Or behave badly in private.

Now on to Man Two: Colonel Brandon.

COLONEL BRANDON: (*stiffly and formally*) Pleased to make your acquaintance.

NARRATOR: He has an intriguing secret, too, even though he wears a flannel waistcoat, which is like some kind of fuzzy vest, and is yet another warning sign, at least for Marianne.

COLONEL BRANDON: At least I don’t drive a barouche.

NARRATOR: And you’re respectable.

COLONEL BRANDON: Quite. (*pause*) Mmm... Depending on what my secret is. (*raises eyebrows*)

NARRATOR: Don’t go far, Colonel, we may need you later.

MARIANNE: What about... (*with a dreamy voice and a heavy sigh*) Willoughby.

NARRATOR: Yes, yes. Man Three. Willoughby.



WILLOUGHBY: I'm Willoughby OF Allenham, actually.

NARRATOR: Which brings us to Rule 3 for eligibility, having an “of” after your name. Enter Willoughby OF Allenham, and OF Combe Magna, the name of his large house somewhere else, which means something like OVERSIZED COMB. In Gaelic. Or Latin. Not sure. Anyway, not to be outdone by Man One or Man Two, Willoughby also has a secret.

WILLOUGHBY: Yes, but my secret is much more interesting. I should have my own book devoted just to me.

NARRATOR: I think it's time we moved on to the plot. Our story starts, finally, at Norland Park, which is, by the way, a house, not a picnic area, where Edward has come to visit.

EDWARD: Miss Dashwood—Elinor—would you do me the honor of hanging out with me for days on end while I act like I'm totally into you one minute and then give you the cold shoulder the next?

ELINOR: Of course. I have nothing better to do. (*to audience*) Edward doesn't talk about fox-hunting or shooting birds all the time. So I like him, and esteem him.

NARRATOR: In Austen-speak, esteem means “thinks he's hot”.

MRS. DASHWOOD: I'm baaack! My half-step-daughter-in-law has kicked us out of Norland so off we go to a sweet little cottage somewhere else. Owned by a cousin.

ELINOR: We are determined to be happy in our new state of poverty with only three servants, Marianne's pianoforte, and our noisy, noisy cousins inviting us to parties all the time.

MARIANNE: Is it my turn yet?

MRS. DASHWOOD: Yes, dear. Go for your long walk in the rain now, and tumble down a hill.

MARIANNE: (*falls onstage and strikes a damsel in distress pose*) Help, help!

WILLOUGHBY: I save Marianne! Then I visit her every day, recite poetry by heart and act like I'm going to ask her to marry me.

MARIANNE: Oh, Willoughby. (*sigh*)

WILLOUGHBY: Oh, Marianne!

ELINOR: Oh, brother.

MRS. DASHWOOD: Everyone says Mr. Willoughby is respectable. He's handsome AND charming.

COLONEL BRANDON: I must be off. I have urgent business in London. Bring me my horse!

*Sound effect: fast-galloping horse hooves.*

MARIANNE: Who was that again?

ELINOR: Colonel Brandon, dear. Man Two.

WILLOUGHBY: I must be off to London, too, on equally mysterious business. Have I proposed to Marianne yet? Nobody knows! It's a...

EVERYONE: Secret!

*Sound effect: fast galloping horse hooves.*

MARIANNE: (*weeping and wailing*) Oh, Willoughby!

NARRATOR: Meanwhile, enter Lucy Steele.

LUCY STEELE: Hello!! Look at me! Look at me!

NARRATOR: Another cousin of some sort. She also has something to hide.

LUCY STEELE: (*waving to get attention*) Oh, Miss Dashwood! Yoo-hoo, Miss Dashwood!

ELINOR: I've never met you in my life and now we're besties? Why me?

LUCY STEELE: Because I'm going to take great pleasure in telling you a secret that will make you miserable. Then I'll ask you not to tell a soul, just to torment you.

NARRATOR: The ladies now have secrets as well as the gentlemen.

LUCY STEELE: My dear Miss Dashwood, for five years I've been secretly engaged to Edward. And you thought he was YOUR boyfriend. HA!

ELINOR: Excuse me, I have to stop the play here. Why on earth would Edward like this... person?

LUCY STEELE: (*triumphantly flashing a letter signed "love, Edward"*) See!

ELINOR: And if he does, why would I like him?

NARRATOR: He's amiable? Respectable? No? All right. Because Jane Austen Said So.

ELINOR: He's not exactly the typical dashing hero of romance novels. Why him?

NARRATOR: Um, because you like and esteem him? (*aside*) In other words she thinks he's hot.

LUCY STEELE: Come to think of it, why would I agree to get engaged to Edward?

NARRATOR: Money. He's rich.

LUCY STEELE: (*not sarcastically*) I'll get to drive a barouche!

NARRATOR: (*impatiently rolling eyes*) The heroes are not supposed to be perfect because these aren't actually romance novels, they're social commentary. Shall I give the "Jane Austen as the first realistic novelist" lecture? (*reading from phone or different book*); "Women at this time did not have a high reputation in society and so they hardly had any rights..."

EVERYONE ELSE: Stop!

NARRATOR: Ok, fine. We've lost valuable time. We're going to bypass the whole 'girls go to London' bit and skip right to Marianne giving up her will to live.

MARIANNE: I find out Willoughby (*sighs*) is engaged to Miss Grey, who has 30,000 pounds!

NARRATOR: That's money, not weight, by the way.

MARIANNE: Oh, oh, woe is me! (*sobs uncontrollably*)

NARRATOR: We need Colonel Brandon back to explain why he dashed off to London on his horse. And why Willoughby abandoned Marianne. Cue Colonel Brandon!

COLONEL BRANDON: I'm here!

NARRATOR: Make it quick. Time for your big revelation.

COLONEL BRANDON: My secret is... (*sound effect: drum roll*) When I was young, the woman I loved was foisted off on my brother, who abused her. Then he divorced her, and she was forced into prostitution, had a baby and died...

## Pride and Prejudice

### Casting

5W 4M + 1 Any Gender

- NARRATOR:** Appears in modern dress, can be seated in a large comfy chair or at a desk in front of a bookshelf.
- MRS. BENNET:** A very silly woman, voice can get hysterical. Accessory: a handkerchief she waves about. Color identifier: bright, garish orange or yellow.
- JANE BENNET:** Eldest daughter. Very kind and sweet. Accessory: a pretty lace shawl or scarf. Color identifier: a pretty pink.
- ELIZABETH BENNET:** Middle daughter. Witty and lively. Accessory: a pretty flowered shawl or scarf. Color identifier: royal blue.
- LYDIA BENNET:** Youngest daughter. Flirty and silly. Accessory: a fan. Color identifier: a bright red or violet.
- BINGLEY:** Nice looking and well-mannered gentleman. Accessory: a jacket, possibly with a period cravat. Color identifier: blue-grey or silver.
- DARCY:** Stuck up rich gentleman. Accessory: a dark jacket, preferably with a period cravat. Color identifier: gold.
- CHARLOTTE:** Lizzie's best friend. Plain and dull. Accessory: a drab or ugly colored shawl or scarf. Color identifier: brown.
- WICKHAM:** Handsome young army officer, quite charming. Accessory: a red coat. Color identifier: scarlet or deep red.
- MR. COLLINS:** The stupidest most annoying man in England. Accessory: a black coat and priest's collar. Color identifier: a deep grey or black.

### Setting

In addition to the NARRATOR's chair, there should be an empty armchair onstage representing Mr. Bennet, who is referred to in the script but does not appear.

*If you are performing the complete show, include the lines in brackets [like this]. If not, omit the lines in brackets.*

**NARRATOR:** Welcome to Jane Austen's second novel, the 1813 literary smackdown between *Pride and Prejudice*. (*sound effect: Classical music. Or a pop or rock love/hate song*) We'll be racing through the book at record speed, so we'll skip details and even major plot events. This won't spoil the book for you. Not totally. Well, ok, spoiler alert. [Things got quite out of hand with the first play, so no questioning the author, or trying to rewrite the story as we go. Everybody got it?

**EVERYONE:** Yes!

**NARRATOR:** Jane Austen has improved since her first book, *Sense and Sensibility*, and] *Pride and Prejudice* is considered one of the greatest novels ever written. In fact, it's the prototype...

**EVERYONE:** No lectures!

**NARRATOR:** All right. I promise no instructional speeches. (*aside*) But I'll still share the major literary themes. We begin with one of the most famous opening lines of English literature. "It's a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife..." In other words, unsuspecting rich bachelors, meet Mrs. Bennet, desperate mother of five girls with no inheritance. It's Little Boy Blue vs. Godzilla.

**MRS. BENNET:** I'm going to find rich husbands for all my daughters. I don't care who I have to trample.

**NARRATOR:** Welcome to the 19th Century Marriage Sweepstakes! First contestant, Jane. The prettiest and the sweetest Bennet sister.

**JANE:** Dearest mother. I'm sure everything will work out. Well, almost sure.

**NARRATOR:** Now, meet contestant number two, Elizabeth Bennet, Jane's sister.

**ELIZABETH:** Jane is truly sweet, whereas I love to make fun of everybody.

**MRS. BENNET:** Typical Elizabeth. The snarky one. My favorite is Lydia because she's just as silly as me!

**NARRATOR:** Meet contestant number three, Lydia Bennet.

LYDIA: Miss Austen says I have “high animal spirits.” Is that a compliment?

NARRATOR: That’s Austen-speak for a floozy. There are two other sisters, but they’re not really important. We’ve also written out Mr. Bennet, and replaced him with this empty chair, which sums up his contribution to his daughters’ future happiness.

MRS. BENNET: (*talking to empty chair*) Oh, Mr. Bennet! Netherfield Park is let at last...

NARRATOR: That means a really rich man is moving into the neighborhood. (*sound effect: 19th century dance music*) Meet our grand prize, Mr. Bingley.

BINGLEY: Miss Bennet, would you care to dance?

JANE: Oh, yes. Say, you’re adorable.

NARRATOR: Enter Mr. Bingley’s really really rich friend. Mr. Darcy. An even grander grand prize.

DARCY: Bingley, really. How could you like Jane? The Bennets are soooo far below us.

BINGLEY: Seriously, Darcy? Jane is wonderful. There’s her sister, Elizabeth. She’s not bad.

DARCY: (*sneering*) Eeewww.

NARRATOR: It’s Boy Hates Girl. And, by now, you may have gotten the hint that Mr. Darcy represents pride. But just in case you missed it, Mrs. Bennet says:

MRS. BENNET: He is a most disagreeable, horrid man. So high and so conceited.

NARRATOR: And on the off chance that wasn’t clear enough, the girls talk for five, you got it, five pages about Mr. Darcy’s Pride.

ELIZABETH: (*gets worked up*) I hate him! Despise him! Detest him! Loathe him!

NARRATOR: Just to be clear, Elizabeth represents prejudice, or jumping to conclusions before you know a person.

CHARLOTTE: (*waves*) Hi, Lizzie!

ELIZABETH: (*cheerfully*) Oh, hi, Charlotte. (*aside*) My best friend, Charlotte.

NARRATOR: Meet Charlotte Lucas, contestant number four.

CHARLOTTE: I think Mr. Darcy likes you, Lizzie. Don't forget he's got 10,000 pounds a year.

NARRATOR: [Again,] That's money, not weight.

ELIZABETH: (*getting worked up again*) I don't care how rich he is, I loathe the man. I'm positively repulsed by him. I dislike every fiber of his being with a passion.

NARRATOR: (*nodding knowingly*) Girl hates boy.

CHARLOTTE: Ok, ok, we get the point. (*aside*) The lady doth protest too much, methinks.

ELIZABETH: I refuse to marry for money. But should a handsome charming man come my way...

NARRATOR: Enter Mr. Wickham! Is he the consolation prize?

WICKHAM: I also loathe Mr. Darcy, and am perfectly willing to trash him even though I say I would never do that. And I'm definitely handsome and charming.

NARRATOR: In Jane Austen, handsome and charming is a BIG red flag.

MRS. BENNET: Elizabeth, our cousin Mr. Collins is coming for a visit. He'll inherit all your father's money. You must marry him.

NARRATOR: Meet Mr. Collins, booby prize.

ELIZABETH: Eeewww.

MR. COLLINS: (*puffed up and obnoxiously*) I, the venerable Mr. Collins... am the stupidest most annoying man in England, but I'll be rich, or well, somewhat rich. So what if Elizabeth is out of my league? Marriage is a business transaction. Oh... Elizabeth... will you marry me?

ELIZABETH: (*smiling nicely, then rolling her eyes*) No, thank you.

MR. COLLINS: You're just saying that to tease me. You don't really mean it.

EVERYONE ELSE: No means no! Even in 19th century England!

CHARLOTTE: I'll marry you, Mr. Collins.

ELIZABETH: Charlotte, how could you?

CHARLOTTE: Because marriage is a business transaction.

*Sound effect: wedding march.*

NARRATOR: We have our first winner. Sort of. Shall I explain the oppressive system...

EVERYONE: No!

JANE: Things were going very well between Mr. Bingley and me. But, where did he go?

DARCY: Town.

NARRATOR: Which means London.

MRS. BENNET: (*wringing her hands*) And where has Wickham gone?

LYDIA: (*moping*) The beach. With the army.

MRS. BENNET: Why are all the young men running away from us?

NARRATOR: Because you're Godzilla?

ELIZABETH: Come on, Jane, we're outta here. You go to London and I'll visit Charlotte and her stupid annoying husband.

LYDIA: I'll go to the beach! To flirt with all the officers!

NARRATOR: (*pointing to the empty chair*) And Mr. Bennet does nothing to rein in Lydia's high animal spirits. Tsk, tsk. Foreshadowing? Meanwhile...

CHARLOTTE: Say, Lizzie, guess who's visiting his aunt in my neighborhood?

NARRATOR: Coincidence?

DARCY: I've fallen in love with Lizzie's intelligence and easy playfulness. How mortifying to like someone so evidently beneath me.

ELIZABETH: Look, here's a letter from Jane. (*holding a pink letter*). It turns out Mr. Darcy kept Bingley from proposing to Jane. Oh, now I hate him more than ever. (*sound effect: a loud door knocker*) Who could that be?

DARCY: Elizabeth, I should hate you. Your family behaves horribly, your sister is trying to snag my best friend, and yet... I like you. I love you in spite of myself. Will you marry me?

ELIZABETH: Never! I find you vile, despicable, loathsome, arrogant, and, and, and, (*building to final insult*) ungentlemanly.

*DARCY gasps loudly.*



NARRATOR: Boy Loses Girl.

DARCY: (*shocked*) Rejected? I'm the richest man in the book. I own a really big mansion up north, Pemberley. That's impossible.  
(*slumps*)

EVERYONE: No means no!

DARCY: (*holding up a four page blue letter*) So I do what people in the 19th century did before texting.

NARRATOR: No, parents, not email.

DARCY: I write a letter! I explain that Mr. Wickham is a villain, and that I was convinced Jane didn't really love Bingley. (*hands letter to ELIZABETH*)

ELIZABETH: (*takes a blue letter*) This letter is four pages long. Do I really have to read it?

EVERYONE: Yes!

NARRATOR: (*holding up a big book*) So while Elizabeth reads Mr. Darcy's letter, we'll take a short break to explain historical context...

EVERYONE: No!

NARRATOR: Oh, all right. (*flipping through pages of book*) Moving right along. Summer. Elizabeth goes on a tour of big houses in the north and ends up...

ELIZABETH: At Pemberley!

NARRATOR: Coincidence?

ELIZABETH: By now, I realize my pride was hurt when Mr. Darcy said "eeewww," and that made me prejudiced against him.

DARCY: And I realize that Elizabeth rejected me because I was snotty, and unfair to Jane.

ELIZABETH: I'm going to give him a chance.

DARCY: I'm going to prove to her I'm not a snob.

NARRATOR: You may think that's the end, but it's not! Not even close. It's what's known as "The Turn." When the protagonist, that is the main character, acquires self-knowledge. In addition to being the first realistic novelist with social commentary thrown

## Mansfield Park

### Casting

4W 3M + 1 Any Gender

**NARRATOR:** Appears in modern dress, can be seated in a large comfy chair or at a desk in front of a bookshelf.

**FANNY PRICE:** Kind and sweet goody two shoes.  
Accessory: a plain scarf or shawl. Color identifier: dark or rich red brown.

**JULIA BERTRAM:** A selfish younger sister, first appears in person and then is represented by a doll.  
Accessory: a simple feather, in a hat or handheld that you can match for the doll.  
Color identifier: hot pink. The doll should have the same accessory and color identifier.

**MARIA BERTRAM:** A stuck up, haughty snob. First appears in person and then is represented by a doll.  
Accessory: any bright bauble that you can match for the doll. Color identifier: bright purple. The doll should have the same accessory and color identifier.

**EDMUND BERTRAM:** A nice, regular dude. Accessory: a dark jacket or coat. Color identifier: a medium brown or tan.

**TOM BERTRAM:** A man about town. More flashy and dramatic than Edmund. Entitled and selfish.  
Accessory: a jacket. Color identifier: blue.

**HENRY CRAWFORD:** An independently wealthy rake (he says so himself). Quite charming and a little bit sleazy. Accessory: a fancy tie. Color identifier: teal or turquoise.

**MARY CRAWFORD:** Charming and well-mannered, sophisticated, but scheming. Playful and witty. Accessory: a fancy patterned scarf. Color identifier: teal or turquoise.

### Running Time

10 minutes

### Props

For the dolls that replace JULIA and MARIA, have some kind of link to the costume or outfits of the real characters, such as the same color feather or piece of jewelry that more or less matches the actors.

*If you are performing the complete show, include the lines in brackets [like this]. If not, omit the lines in brackets.*

NARRATOR: Welcome to the instant version of Jane Austen’s third novel, 1814’s *Mansfield Park*. Long. Serious. Seriously ironic. (*sound effect: music, classical or a modern song about being an independent girl*) But, not many people, except Jane Austen fanatics, have heard of it, much less read it. So, I’m actually thinking we can skip it.

EVERYONE: No! That’s not fair.

NARRATOR: But it’s 500 pages long! A little historical note, (*EVERYONE groans*) it was THE favorite book of Victorian gentlemen, who thought every woman should be just like the main character, Fanny Price. Sweet, shy, and excessively prim and proper. [Nothing like rebel warrior Elizabeth from *Pride and Prejudice*.] To help modern viewers understand the book, here’s a step-by-step guide to becoming Fanny Price, the perfect heroine. To be just like Fanny Price, first you have to be kidnapped by a rich aunt from your “modest house,” which in Austen-speak means seriously down and out. Then, arrive exhausted to Mansfield Park, the seat of your conveniently rich uncle, Sir Thomas Bertram. Seat, as in mega-mall-sized mansion, not park bench. Meet the four Bertram kids, your cousins, two boys and two girls. Cry. A lot. For a long time.

FANNY: (*Whimpers and sticks lower lip out, looks distressed. In despair*) Hello, my name is Fanny Price, and I don’t know the chronological order of all the kings of England. I must be stupid.

MARIA: (*snobbishly*) Hello, I’m Miss Bertram, Maria. Oldest girl cousin. Pronounced Marr–eye–ah. (*excitedly*) Ooooh, a dance! Let’s go!! (*changing to a serious tone*) Not you, Fanny.

JULIA: (*giggling*) I’m Julia. The younger girl cousin. Just as stuck-up. (*glibly*) Time to flit off to London for “the season.” (*seriously*) Not you, Fanny.

NARRATOR: Step two in becoming Fanny, conquer your FOMO, because you’re gonna get left out. A lot.

FANNY: My cousins Maria and Julia are going to balls, even to London, riding about the countryside in barouches...

NARRATOR: [You will remember that in *Sense and Sensibility*, a barouche was like a flashing red light warning signal. Same

in *Mansfield Park*.] Clearly, Jane Austen has a thing against barouches.

FANNY: If only a dashing hero would save the day!

NARRATOR: Unfortunately, there's a shortage of true heroes in this novel, so we'll have to settle for Edmund Bertram. First cousin. Second son of Sir Thomas Bertram, owner of Mansfield Park.

EDMUND: Fanny, here's a horse you can ride whenever you want.

*Sound effect: horse hooves trotting.*

FANNY: Edmund is the only truly nice cousin! (*aside*) So, naturally, I fall in love with him.

NARRATOR: Don't think about the genetic implications of this, we don't have time.

EDMUND: I'm actually quite fond of Fanny, too.

NARRATOR: Awww. Spoiler alert: Edmund and Fanny are made for each other. So, that's a wrap, right? No need to introduce the Crawfords, a brother and sister pair who live nearby?

HENRY CRAWFORD: (*waves frantically*) Hold on! We're only 30 pages into a 500-page novel. (*proudly*) Henry Crawford at your service. Independently wealthy rake. The whole plot turns on the discovery of my true character.

MARY CRAWFORD: (*drippingly sweet*) My dear brother, Henry. Wrong again. That would be me, Mary Crawford. The whole plot turns on my character. Am I good or am I bad? (*bats eyelashes sweetly, then raises eyebrows in a mischievous way*)

NARRATOR: [Not another insurrection! I thought you'd all learned your lesson in *Sense and Sensibility*.] (*reluctantly*) Meet Henry and Mary Crawford, the Bertram's next door neighbors. Satisfied? Can we skip to the end now?

MARY: May I point out that Miss Austen wrote us? Who wrote you again, Narrator?

EDMUND: (*dreamily*) Mary Crawford certainly is beautiful. We should let them stay.

NARRATOR: Oh, all right. Don't blame me if this all gets a bit confusing. It took Jane Austen 500 pages, after all. But, racing on, the Crawford siblings arrive for a visit at Mansfield Park.

HENRY CRAWFORD: I'm charming, I'm single. I'm ready for love.  
Where are Maria and Julia Bertram?

NARRATOR: We had to write them out to save time. Those dolls are stand-ins. (*hands Maria and Julia dolls to HENRY*) Henry, I have to warn you, Maria is engaged to a very rich and stupid gentleman, and Julia drives around in a barouche.

HENRY CRAWFORD: (*tosses dolls aside*) Ah, fair enough. I'm not the marrying kind anyway.

EDMUND: (*waving a little shyly*) Yo, Mary, I'm Edmund Bertram. Are you the marrying kind?

MARY: Well, it depends. Are you going to inherit Mansfield Park?

EDMUND: (*dejectedly*) That would be my older brother, Tom.

NARRATOR: Introducing Tom Bertram, first born son of a baronet.  
Which is not a musical instrument. It's an itsy bitsy baron.  
Meanwhile...

TOM: (*dancing disco*) I'm off to London to party and spend waaaay too much money.

MARY: Oh, that's disappointing. (*brightening*) The second son, Edmund, will have to do. Woohoo, Edmund, can you teach me to ride a horse?

EDMUND: (*enthusiastically*) You won't mind, Fanny, if I give Mary your horse?

*Sound effect: slow horse hooves.*

FANNY: (*frowns and crosses her arms*) I'm terribly hurt.

NARRATOR: Remember, you are the perfect heroine. Squash that FOMO!

FANNY: (*rolls her eyes and fake-smiles, speaking through clenched teeth*) I don't mind really. Truly. Honestly.

TOM: I'm back!

EVERYONE: Already?

NARRATOR: FYI, that means Tom ran out of money in London.

TOM: Let's put on a theatrical!

NARRATOR: Fancy word for play.

FANNY: Oh, no! That would NOT be proper.

NARRATOR: Step three to being the perfect heroine includes being a killjoy. Relentlessly. Like all the time.

FANNY: Excuse me, I have a question. Why does Fanny think a play is wrong? We're putting on a play here, after all.

NARRATOR: This isn't just any play. It's called *Lover's Vows*. The characters have to touch each other onstage. Scandal!

HENRY CRAWFORD: (*leering*) Miss Fanny Price, perhaps we can rehearse alone and I'll explain...

FANNY: There's something about Henry Crawford I don't like. Edmund would never act in a play.

MARY: (*clasps hands together, pleading and batting eyelashes*) Oh, please, Edmund. Pretty please. With sugar on top?

EDMUND: Anything for you, Mary.

FANNY: (*aghast*) Edmund, how could you?

HENRY CRAWFORD: (*holding Maria doll, smirking at it, adoringly and lecherously*) Oh, Miss Bertram! Marr-eye-ah! If Fanny won't rehearse with me, maybe you will.

FANNY: But she's engaged! The way Mr. Crawford looks at Maria is sooo wrong.

NARRATOR: (*flips through large book*) Ok, we gotta speed this up. Henry flirts with engaged Maria, and she flirts back... Blah blah blah. Tom goes away, comes back, goes away again. More blah blah blah. Then, on page three hundred and whatever Henry Crawford does something unexpected...

HENRY CRAWFORD: Fanny, will you marry me?

NARRATOR: Sincere? Not sincere? Anyone's guess.

FANNY: No, thank you.

NARRATOR: Yes! At last! Signs of life from Fanny Price. [She may be turning into Elizabeth Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice* after all.]

*Sound effect: cheering, bazooka sounds, applause.*

FANNY: My uncle wants me to marry Henry Crawford. He sends me back to my family of origin's modest house. The food is slop. I miss my horse. I hate it. (*holding up hands like a scale and shifting*)

*back and forth, weighing options*) If I marry Henry Crawford, I could help my family with his money... But I love Edmund. But Edmund loves Mary. What would the perfect heroine do?

NARRATOR: Wait! More plot developments! (*flipping through book*) Things are getting interesting now.

FANNY: More interesting than me not getting to ride my horse?

NARRATOR: (*savoring the excitement*) Oh, yes. Welcome to Mansfield Parklandia, a theme park with wild rides through slavery, poverty, oppression, seduction, ruination...

FANNY: But this is a family show!

NARRATOR: Right. Skipping a boat ride through The Tunnel of Jane Austen's Dark Side, then? Cue Henry Crawford's next unexpected move.

HENRY CRAWFORD: (*holding Maria doll*) I can't wait for our perfect heroine to make up her mind. Maria, will you run away with me? (*puts doll up to ear and squeaks a little answer like a ventriloquist*) That's a yes? Brilliant!

FANNY: (*cheerfully*) Whew! That was a narrow escape. (*sticks lower lip out*) I can go back to pining for Edmund again.

NARRATOR: (*disappointedly, and in a monotone, like it's a real drag to say this*) Back to step one of Becoming Fanny, be pitiful.

FANNY: If only Edmund would see what Mary and Henry are really like! After all, he ran away with my cousin Maria when she was engaged.

HENRY CRAWFORD: Remember, I'm not the marrying kind...

EVERYONE: Oh, no! Maria will be ruined!

NARRATOR: I won't explain what that means, just trust me, it's REALLY bad.

EDMUND: Oh, Mary, I'm so sorry we'll never be able to admit Henry or Maria into our society.

NARRATOR: (*stage whispering*) Translation from Austen-speak: They'll have to ghost them.

MARY: I disagree. We'll make Henry marry Maria and then we can party with them, too.

EVERYONE gasps.

## Emma

### Casting

3W 4M + 1 Any Gender

**NARRATOR:** Appears in modern dress, can be seated in a large comfy chair or at a desk in front of a bookshelf.

**EMMA WOODHOUSE:** Handsome, clever, and rich. Not your typical Jane Austen heroine. Even though she thinks she knows everything, she's kindhearted so she should not be played like a mean girl. She genuinely thinks she's helping. Accessory: a fancy scarf or hat. Color identifier: gold.

**HARRIET SMITH:** Emma's less fortunate friend. She's lived in a boarding school her whole life and is naïve and clueless. She speaks in an airy, empty-headed kind of way. She's very sweet and sincere, though. Accessory: a shawl or lace handkerchief. Color identifier: pink.

**MR. KNIGHTLEY:** Emma's sister's husband's brother. Kind of like an older brother to Emma. He is full of advice all the time and, just like Emma, thinks he knows everything. Except he's clueless when it comes to his own heart. Accessory: a tie or cravat, not fancy. Color identifier: brown or beige.

**MR. WOODHOUSE:** Emma's elderly father. He seems sweet and a little dithering, but he is also anxious and controlling in his own way. Accessory: a winter scarf or blanket. Color identifier: grey or light blue.

**MR. ELTON:** The local clergyman, a young, handsome bachelor. Friendly and hero-like, until he turns out to be a snob. Accessory: a black and white clergy collar. Color identifier: black.

**FRANK CHURCHILL:** The son of a neighbor who comes back for the first time in years and years. Handsome and charming. Is he all that he seems? A big flirt. Smirks a lot. Accessory: a fancy jacket or tie. Color identifier: peacock or teal.

**JANE FAIRFAX:** Elegant, accomplished (which means she's got talent) lovely in every way. Quite reserved and soft-spoken. Accessory: a pretty shawl or simple but elegant hat. Color identifier: turquoise or aqua.



*If you are performing the complete show, include the lines in brackets [like this]. If not, omit the lines in brackets.*

NARRATOR: Welcome to Instant Austen's *Emma*, Jane Austen's fourth novel, first published in 1815. (*sound effect: pop music about being independent or classical music*) And still popular today with no less than five film adaptations. Don't get your hopes up, though, our version will be nothing like those. We're going to race right through the novel in record time. And it's a doozy. A tour de force of characterization and plot machinations...

EMMA: Excuse me, this is my book. NO lectures on literature. [The others warned me about you.]

HARRIET: I agree with Miss Woodhouse. I always agree with Miss Woodhouse, even when it hurts me, and is against my own true feelings.

EMMA: Thank you, Harriet. You're a sweet little friend.

NARRATOR: Hold on! I've got to give some background. No one knows who you are yet.

EMMA: Well, get on with it then. Introduce us. Starting with Mr. Knightley.

MR. KNIGHTLEY: Typical Emma, trying to tell everyone what to do when. That's my job. Since I seem to have adopted the role of elder brother to Emma.

EMMA: Mr. Knightley, you are not my brother. You're merely my sister's husband's brother. Besides, you're late. We've already started.

NARRATOR: (*frustrated*) We have NOT started! I haven't even finished the introduction.

MR. WOODHOUSE: (*fretfully*) Oh, dear, this is a very worrying degree of chaos.

EMMA: I'm so sorry, Father. (*whispers*) That's my elderly father, Mr. Woodhouse. He's overly sensitive. And controlling. And quite determined to deny cake to wedding guests. But everyone thinks he's the sweetest man alive, even me.

NARRATOR: There, that proves that *Emma* is brilliant.

EMMA: Why, thank you.

NARRATOR: I meant the novel. As I was about to say, in *Emma*, Miss Austen creates such complex characters...

EMMA: No literary analysis. Please. Nobody cares. Not when Emma Woodhouse is nearby.

NARRATOR: ... that we don't know who to trust, who to like, or even who is meant to marry who... or whom... or whomst.

HARRIET: Yes, it's so hard to know what to think.

EMMA: Only for you, dear Harriet, but never mind.

MR. WOODHOUSE: Excuse me, I'm hopelessly confused already, and I'm IN the book.

MR. KNIGHTLEY: I recommend we start over.

EMMA: But...

NARRATOR: Right. Mr. Knightley is right, as usual. Rebooting. (*sound effect: opening music*) Welcome to *Emma*, Jane Austen's fourth novel, first published in 1815... blah blah blah... a tour de force of characterization and plot machinations all centered around one question: Who can you trust? What happens when cool people do uncool things? If you can't be trusted, are you cool?

MR. WOODHOUSE: (*fretting*) That was three questions. Oh, dear. I hope I can keep up.

NARRATOR: Well, [just like *Mansfield Park*,] this is a 500 page book, and we're condensing. So you'll just have to go with it.

MR. WOODHOUSE: As long as you don't serve cake...

NARRATOR: No time for cake! We'll start with Jane Austen's second best opening line [second only to "It's a truth..." yada yada yada], "Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever and rich." Central question: Is Emma cool or not cool?

EMMA: I shipped my governess and a wealthy neighbor and they ended up married. Cool points for that!

NARRATOR: Remember, you're only as good as your next match. Meanwhile, on to Mr. Knightley. Older brother of Emma's older sister's husband, making him, well, not a genetic relative, [a great relief after *Mansfield Park*] and much older than Emma. He's an expert at advice... currently known as mansplaining...

MR. KNIGHTLEY: It's not easy being right all the time.

NARRATOR: Now, meet Harriet Smith. Someone important's illegitimate daughter, which we can't explain in a family show, but which means she has to grow up in a boarding school. She's definitely nice, even if she's a little... well... clueless.

HARRIET: Hi, everybody! Harriet here. I may not be handsome, clever or rich, but I'm loyal, cheerful and honest.

NARRATOR: Sincerity is definitely cool. Next, meet the clergyman, Mr. Elton. [Definitely not anything like Mr. Collins from *P and P*, this clergyman is actually] good-looking, and eligible, which means he has decorated his house and is looking for a housekeeper, um... I mean wife.

MR. ELTON: Good evening, I'm Mr. Elton. It's my role to be very friendly with Emma and Harriet. And attentive to Mr. Woodhouse.

NARRATOR: He treats women as friends, that seems cool.

HARRIET: Ooh, I have news. A local farmer I like asked me to marry him! What do you think I should do, Miss Woodhouse?

NARRATOR: Mutual affection is cool.

EMMA: Harriet, I can't tell you not to marry that farmer who is so obviously below you and would ruin your life. I won't say you should go for Mr. Elton instead.

NARRATOR: Manipulating friend, not cool.

MR. KNIGHTLEY: Emma, you talked Harriet into turning down the farmer? Sometimes you can be sooo misguided. Mr. Elton is in love with you.

NARRATOR: Emma missing the obvious signals from Mr. Elton, not cool.

MR. ELTON: Oh, Miss Woodhouse, I adore you. Will you marry me?

EMMA: But, Mr. Elton, what about Miss Smith?

MR. ELTON: What? Why? Who cares about Harriet Smith? Everybody has their level, but I am not so much at a loss as to stoop to someone so obviously below me.

NARRATOR: Oops, Mr. Elton is a snob. Not cool.

MR. KNIGHTLEY: Told you so.

NARRATOR: Bragging about being right? Not cool. (*flips through a big book*) But we'll move on... Blah blah blah... Many more pages of Emma foolishly applying her cleverness and Harriet mooning over Mr. Elton and her farmer, and then, along comes Frank Churchill.

FRANK CHURCHILL: After 21 years living with a wealthy aunt, I'm finally visiting my father, the Woodhouse's neighbor. Everyone thinks I would make a very good match for Emma.

NARRATOR: Handsome and charming? Usually not cool in Austenland, but we'll reserve judgement.

MR. KNIGHTLEY: I don't trust Frank Churchill.

EMMA: But he's handsome and clever just like me. I think I'm in love with him.

NARRATOR: Flirting shamelessly? Not cool.

JANE FAIRFAX: Excuse me, isn't it time I appeared on the scene?

NARRATOR: Who do we have here? (*consulting notes*) Ah, Jane Fairfax. Visiting her nearby poor relations.

JANE FAIRFAX: (*shyly, not snobbishly*) I'm more beautiful than Emma, I play the piano better, I sing better. I'm also quite reserved. And terribly poor.

[NARRATOR: Judging from *Sense and Sensibility*, or *Mansfield Park*, Jane Fairfax should be our heroine. But, Jane Austen wanted to mix it up, so no more quiet, dull heroines].

EMMA: I just cannot like Jane Fairfax, no matter how perfect she is.

FRANK CHURCHILL: Jane Fairfax? Who could love Jane Fairfax? Come on, Emma. You're clever like me, let's make fun of everyone.

EMMA: Oooh, goodie, a game. I'm going to say mean things to all my friends. Especially the poor ones.

NARRATOR: Yeah, no, dissing your friends is not cool.

MR. KNIGHTLEY: Badly done, Emma!

EMMA: Yes, that was wrong of me. However, I'm not in love with Frank Churchill after all, and I've decided to match Harriet with Frank. (*puts index finger to lips*) Shhhh... Don't tell Mr. Knightley.

NARRATOR: More misguided matchmaking? Not cool.

MR. KNIGHTLEY: We know how well that went last time. Besides, something is up with Frank Churchill...

EMMA: Do be quiet, Mr. Knightley. Woohooo, Harriet, I know who... whom... whomst... you should marry.

HARRIET: But he's so far above me. He's such a gentleman.

EMMA: That shouldn't matter. You're somebody's daughter. Go for it.

HARRIET: I think he likes me too.

NARRATOR: Now, if you notice, neither Harriet nor Emma actually said the name of the person they're talking about. Mmmm... Foreshadowing? But first, remember this novel is about trust, so Miss Austen reveals a secret we should have guessed many pages ago, if we had only listened to Mr. Knightley.

FRANK CHURCHILL: My rich aunt has died, and I am free to marry who... whom... whomst... I please. I'm actually secretly engaged to...

JANE FAIRFAX: Me! Jane Fairfax!

MR. KNIGHTLEY: I told you so.

NARRATOR: Still bragging about always being right, not cool.

EMMA: Oh, Harriet, I just found out Frank is engaged to Jane. I'm so sorry. There goes your marriage to a gentleman.

HARRIET: What? Why? Who cares about Frank Churchill? I was talking about Mr. Knightley!

EMMA: (*horrified*) Mr. Knightley? And you said he likes you, too?

HARRIET: Yes, I think he does!

NARRATOR: Now, in typical Jane Austen fashion, we have 20 pages of introspection explaining *The Turn*, which is when the main character develops self-knowledge. But since we're short on time here, we'll just go with it, and say that Emma finally figures out...

EMMA: I'm in love with Mr. Knightley! That's who... whom... whomst... I'm supposed to marry. But Harriet says he's in love with her! This is awful.

NARRATOR: This is where I remind the audience that Harriet is clueless. And we skip another wad of pages to...

## Northanger Abbey and Persuasion

### Casting

4W 4M + | Any Gender

**NARRATOR:** Appears in modern dress, can be seated in a large comfy chair or at a desk in front of a bookshelf. Holds index cards like an old-timey game show host reading about contestants. Switches from narrator, serious voice to excited circus barker game show host voice.

**CATHERINE MORLAND:** The heroine of *Northanger Abbey*. Seventeen years old and naïve. Reads a lot of gothic romance novels, bodice ripper type things, and is always expecting melodrama. She is steady and loyal, though, and has a strong moral compass. Accessory: a romance novel. Color identifier: a pale peach or pink.

**ANNE ELLIOT:** The heroine of *Persuasion*. Twenty-eight when the novel begins. She was in love with a nobody when she was nineteen and her family and friends persuaded her to break off her engagement to him. She's never loved anyone else. She's intelligent, wise, and calm. Not at all like the other vain snobs in her family. Accessory: a book of poetry. Color identifier: a medium or light blue.

**CAPTAIN WENTWORTH:** Anne's former fiancée. A swashbuckling hero of the Navy. After Anne broke off her engagement, he made a fortune and returns to Anne's circle of family and friends. Resentful at first, he soon realizes he's still in love with her. Accessory: a captain's spyglass made from paper towel cardboard and toilet paper cardboard in successive sizes wrapped with black paper or painted and striped with gold or a rolled up chart or map. Color identifier: navy blue.

**LADY RUSSELL:** Stand-in mom to Anne Elliot. Elegant, haughty and competitive. Accessory: a flowery or elegant scarf. Color identifier: deep teal.

**MRS. ALLEN:** Wealthy older neighbor of Catherine Morland who invites her on a trip to Bath, England. Not as elegant as Lady Russell, and

a bit silly. Into dresses and shopping and girly things more than books or reading. Can even be giggly. Accessory: a lacy, gaudy scarf or shawl. Color identifier: a bright yellow or gold.

**HENRY TILNEY:** The witty hero of *Northanger Abbey*. He's not silly, but he is wry. Great off the wall sense of humor. Accessory: a priestly collar. Color identifier: black, or a deep brown or maroon.

**MR. ELLIOT:** Anne's cousin. The most villainous villain ever because he appears charming and soft-spoken. He's duplicitous and sneaky. Accessory: a fancy bow-tie or cravat. Color identifier: a muddy green.

**JOHN THORPE:** Friend of Catherine's. A far more obvious villain. Loud and obnoxious. Accessory: a dark jacket or coat. Color identifier: an ugly orange.

**EXTRA ROLE LOUISA:** Anne's sister's sister-in-law. Can be a non-speaking role or represented with a doll.

## The Scoreboard

This play features a competition between Team Northanger Abbey and Team Persuasion, and a score is kept. This can be represented by a physical scoreboard such as a chalkboard or a poster board and markers, a projection on a screen, or a flip chart like an old fashioned Rolodex. Optional sound effect of score changes, such as a bell, a “ka-ching” or a flip-board scoreboard ratchet sound can be added each time the score changes. The NARRATOR can be in charge of changing the score, or a prop person can remain onstage and change any physical score.

## Costumes

I suggest creating a team color scheme based on the Color identifiers: warm tones, reds and golds for Team Northanger, and cool tones, blues and greens, for Team Persuasion. Alternatively, choose a warm t-shirt color, such as bright pink, for Team Northanger and a cool t-shirt color, such as bright blue for Team Persuasion and dress each team in their own team “uniform.” If resources are available, have t-shirts printed with the team name. If using one team color, use the accessories to identify characters, especially if doubling up on casting.

*If you are performing the complete show, include the lines in brackets [like this]. If not, omit the lines in brackets.*

**NARRATOR:** (*holding a book*) Welcome to [the final installment of] *Instant Austen: Jane Austen at Warp Speed with Northanger Abbey and Persuasion*, two books published together in 1817. Published posthumously, after Miss Austen was gone, so she couldn't object to them being lumped together. On the one hand we have *Northanger Abbey*, a mock-melodrama with a haunted mansion, written when Miss Austen was young and then stuffed in a drawer somewhere. Then there's *Persuasion*, written much later, a more mature tale of lost love. (*shaking head*) Vastly different storylines, opposite heroines, heroes, even opposite villains, leaving the reader with whiplash. Great compare and contrast essay topic. But, no homework here. Since this is not your great-great-great-great grandmother's Jane Austen, we're pitting them against each other in our very own Game. Of. Gowns. Welcome to *Northanger Abbey* VERSUS *Persuasion*. (*sound effect: hard rock music on the theme of rebellion*) Everybody ready?

**EVERYONE:** Yes, let's do this!

**NARRATOR:** That's the spirit! May the best book win! (*in circus barker voice*) Introducing, Team Northanger Abbey captain, straight outta Bath, England, a town, not a bathtub... teen phenom, gothic novel fan, and gullible sweetheart, clocking in at age 17, Catherine Mooooorland.

*Sound effect: applause and fan horns tooting.*

(*reading from an index card like introducing a contestant on a game show*) Catherine lists her favorite pastimes as cricket, baseball, horseback riding, and running about the country with her nine brothers and sisters.

**CATHERINE:** I have an affectionate heart, and a cheerful, open disposition.

**NARRATOR:** In the other corner, we have the skipper of Team *Persuasion*, straight outta, well, also Bath, England, 28 year old Anne Elliot of Kellynch Hall, daughter of a baronet. (*aside*) That's a baby Baron. So, Anne is kinda like royalty.

*Sound effect: applause.*

**ANNE:** I'm intelligent and nice. But my bloom has faded according to my vain father, Sir Walter.



NARRATOR: Oh, dear, this competition is steeper than I thought. Youthful exuberance versus wise worldliness. One point for each. (*Northanger Abbey 1, Persuasion 1*) (*sound effect: score change*) Hmmmm... Other team members?

CAPTAIN WENTWORTH: (*wielding captain's spyglass or rolled up map or chart*) Captain Wentworth here! Navy man. Reporting for duty.

CATHERINE: (*clutching her romance novel*) Oooh, he's cute. Like a real romance novel hero. I hope he's on my team!

NARRATOR: Sorry, Captain Wentworth is on Team Persuasion. Better luck next time, Catherine. You've got Henry Tilney on your team.

CATHERINE: What's he like?

NARRATOR: (*flipping through cards*) Let's see, [another] clergyman. [Dear, dear. If *Pride and Prejudice* is any guide, Team Northanger Abbey might be in trouble. But]... wait... could be good... Henry is clever. Described as "if not handsome, very near it." Mmmm. First point to *Persuasion* for naval hero.

*Northanger Abbey 1, Persuasion 2.*

*Sound effect: score change.*

CATHERINE: But is Henry Tilney nice? When do I get to meet him?

NARRATOR: Be patient. (*switching to a game show host voice*) Also on both teams, our heroines' trusted advisors.

These women are sensible and kind, [nothing like the emoticon-extremes of Mrs. Bennet or Mrs. Dashwood].

On Team Persuasion's squad, wealthy neighbor to the Elliots of Kellynch Hall, Lady Russell, (*looking down at cards*) a master at persuasion, hence the title of the book. (*big drawn-out voice*) Here she is... Laaaaady Russell!

*Sound effect: applause.*

LADY RUSSELL: I persuaded Anne, when she was younger, to break her engagement to Mr. Wentworth. When he was only a naval-officer-wannabee and... wait for it... penniless.

NARRATOR: Uh oh, that's a point deduction for team Persuasion for snobbery.

*Sound effect: score change.*

CATHERINE: Wait? What? Anne had a chance to marry a naval hero and she turned him down? Wow.

CAPTAIN WENTWORTH: Wow is right. I'm back, eight years later, but now I've made a fortune. I'm a man of action. I know my own mind. I still hold Anne's persuasivabilityness – say, is that a word? – against her...

NARRATOR: Uh oh again. That's another point deduction to *Persuasion* for a hero who holds a grudge.

*Northanger Abbey 1, Persuasion 0.*

*Sound effect: score change.*

ANNE: Oh, dear, I'm afraid Team Persuasion is falling behind.

CATHERINE: What about my Trusted Advisor? This could be a clincher for Team Northanger.

NARRATOR: Introducing Mrs. Allen, also a wealthy neighbor. (*reading from cards*) Mrs. Allen has, according to Miss Austen, neither beauty, genius, accomplishment nor manner.

CATHERINE: Oh, dear. Not looking good.

NARRATOR: Without further ado, give it up for Northanger's very own... Mrs. Aaaallen.

MRS. ALLEN: Hello there! I pluck Catherine out of her country escapades and take her to Bath, where I accompany her to the Lower Rooms.

NARRATOR: Not a basement, just some sort of crowded meeting place in the center of town where people go to see and be seen.

MRS. ALLEN: And, there, I engage Mr. Tilney in a deep conversation about dress fabrics and whether they are likely to fray. Take that, Lady Russell.

NARRATOR: Well done, introducing heroine to love interest equals one point Team Northanger.

*Northanger Abbey 2 Persuasion 0.*

*Sound effect: score change.*

CATHERINE: Where is Mr. Tilney?

HENRY TILNEY: Here I am! Eager to chitchat and to make fun of chitchatting. I quip that Miss Morland will describe me to

her diary as a half-witted man who distressed her with his nonsense when I would wish she would write that I am a most extraordinary genius that she should like to know more of. Miss Morland, would you care to dance?

CATHERINE: Ok, so he's a bit strange. But he does make me laugh.

NARRATOR: Let's see, Mr. Tilney can discuss muslins, which we're guessing is some sort of cottony-gauzy fabric, and has a good sense of humor. He's friendly to Mrs. Allen and Catherine. Maybe almost-handsome clergyman beats out swashbuckling navy officer after all... So one point for Oddball Hero to Team Northanger Abbey

*Northanger Abbey 3 Persuasion 0.*

*Sound effect: score change.*

ANNE: This is beginning to seem hopeless. (*then, as if a lightbulb has gone off in her head*) Except, wait! What about villains? [Jane Austen always has good villains, and she was at the height of her skills with *Persuasion*.]

NARRATOR: Ah, yes, this might be the game changer. (*switch to game show host voice*) Introducing the slimiest, most ingratiating, wickedest villainous villain ever, Team Persuasion's very own Mr. Elliot, not to be confused with Sir Walter, the vain dad, this is the vain cousin...

*Sound effect: applause.*

MR. ELLIOT: I will inherit Sir Walter's title, the house, the fortune, everything... (*laughs a wickedly evil sneering villain laugh*).

CATHERINE: That's no fair. They get all the gothic romance novel characters!

MR. ELLIOT: But wait. Something's not right here. Miss Austen describes me as "rational, discreet, polished." I am NOT a typical romance novel villain.

NARRATOR: Exactly! Two points to Team Persuasion for a deceptively charming villain.

*Northanger Abbey 3, Persuasion 2.*

*Sound effect: score change.*

LADY RUSSELL: I like him! I think he would make Anne a very good husband.

NARRATOR: I'm afraid that's a one point deduction to Team Persuasion for trusted advisor bad judgment.

*Northanger Abbey 3, Persuasion 1.*

*Sound effect: score change.*

MRS. ALLEN: What about us? Northanger Abbey must have a villainous villain, too. You would think.

NARRATOR: Yes! Coming out of left field to chase after the naïve heroine thinking she'll inherit Mrs. Allen's fortune... welcome newcomer to Team Northanger Abbey, John Thorpe!

*Sound effect: applause.*

JOHN THORPE: (*sneeringly, dastardly*) Oh, Miss Morland?! Will you come for a ride with me in my barouche?

[NARRATOR: Apparently, because she was written before *Sense and Sensibility*, Catherine did not get the memo about staying away from men with barouches.]

CATHERINE: But I have a date with Mr. Tilney and his sister.

JOHN THORPE: I just saw them way on the other side of town somewhere...

NARRATOR: No! Catherine is taken in. She gets in the barouche! Two point deduction to Catherine of *Northanger Abbey* for believing an obvious lie.

*Northanger Abbey 1, Persuasion 1.*

*Sound effect: score change.*

CATHERINE: Look, there are Henry and his sister knocking at my door. I'm getting out of the barouche. Immediately.

NARRATOR: Standing up for yourself, one point Team Northanger.

*Northanger Abbey 2, Persuasion 1.*

*Sound effect: score change.*

JOHN THORPE: I'm going to propose to Catherine, sort of, and lie about how rich she is to my friends. And lie about the Tilneys, and lie...

NARRATOR: Ok, ok, we get it. One point penalty for Team Northanger for too obvious a villain.

*Northanger Abbey 1, Persuasion 1.**Sound effect: score change.*

HENRY TILNEY: Miss Morland, would you accompany me and my sister up north somewhere to our father's mansion, Northanger Abbey?

MRS. ALLEN: So that's what the book is named for, the Tilneys' really big house? I kept expecting monks to show up. Catherine, you should accept Henry's invitation.

CATHERINE: (*gleefully beside herself with the anticipation of horrors*) I get to visit an ancient haunted abbey! A mysterious death in the past! A locked chest in my room! An off-limits wing of the mansion! Oh my! And witty, odd Mr. Tilney thrown in for good measure. Yes! Yes! Yes!

NARRATOR: Clever riff on gothic atmosphere: One point *Northanger Abbey*. (*Northanger Abbey 2, Persuasion 1*) (*sound effect: score change*) In all fairness, we must give Team Persuasion a chance to catch up. Let's see what's up with Anne.

ANNE: I'm still in love with Captain Wentworth. No matter how much he flirts with my sister's sister-in-law...

NARRATOR: (*to audience*) Don't ask, no time.

MR. ELLIOT: Take solace, my dear cousin Anne, in my company.

NARRATOR: We're just going to ignore the genetic implications of cousins marrying cousins here... and hope Anne has better sense than to fall for Mr. Elliot.

ANNE: Mr. Elliot is indeed very attentive. (*holds up poetry book*) But I prefer clever, well-informed people...

NARRATOR: One point for Team Persuasion for heroine's good judgement. (*Northanger Abbey 2, Persuasion 2*) (*sound effect: score change*) (*like a horse race announcer*) Seems like Team Persuasion is making a comeback. On the homestretch, both books are headed toward their big climactic moments. Which one will win out? Back to *Northanger Abbey*, where Catherine has broken into the off-limits wing of the Abbey and is discovered by Henry Tilney, who says...

HENRY TILNEY: Miss Morland?! Are you snooping?

CATHERINE: I suspect your father of murdering your mother! Like in a gothic romance novel!

HENRY TILNEY: That's ridiculous. (*with a wink to audience*) This is real life.

LADY RUSSELL: *Persuasion's* Anne Elliot would never be so silly. What do you think of that, Mrs. Allen?

NARRATOR: Silly heroine, one point deduction for Team Northanger.

*Northanger Abbey 1, Persuasion 2.*

*Sound effect: score change.*

MRS. ALLEN: Ok, but Catherine experiences a rapid downfall—much more sensational than Anne's slow burn with Captain Wentworth.

CATHERINE: (*looking down at a note, then dramatically gasping*) What's this? I'm being shipped home! By post!

NARRATOR: Which does not mean they're stuffing her in an envelope and mailing her. It means she's got to travel alone, on public transportation. Which in Jane Austen's time involves being squeezed in some rickety stagecoach-thingly with people who, like never ever brushed their teeth or used soap. Heroine's dramatic downfall, two points *Northanger Abbey*.

*Northanger Abbey 3, Persuasion 2.*

*Sound effect: score change.*

CAPTAIN WENTWORTH: (*holding out arms and shouting*) Louisa! Don't jump!!

MRS. ALLEN: Who is Louisa?

NARRATOR: Anne's sister's sister-in-law. Don't ask, no time. Back to *Persuasion*, they're on a field trip in Lyme, a town on the seacoast of England, not a citrus fruit, and are walking out on the Cobb, which we gather is not about corn but a high seawall where Louisa, Anne's sister's sister-in-law, is playing a jump-and-catch game with Captain...

*LOUISA, if a real actor, falls to the ground. If represented with a doll, is thrown up in the air and lands on ground. Team Persuasion surrounds her.*

TEAM PERSUASION: (*horrified screams*) AHHHH!!!

CAPTAIN WENTWORTH: Anne's sister's sister-in-law leapt off a ten-foot wall and lies bleeding on the cobblestones!



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