

Discussion Questions for *Sense and Sensibility*

by Jane Austen

1. Austen's language differs from contemporary English (at least the American version) in numerous ways. Does its dense and labyrinthine nature obscure communication and/or does she mean it to be coy, coquettish, or sexy? Perhaps as you read, consider examples of both (too dense; coquettish/sexy) (*Deborah Baker*)
2. In rereading *Sense and Sensibility* after having read it many years ago, I find myself less inclined to love it as I did. I'm interested in what makes a novel a classic. (I remember loving certain books in my childhood that I wanted my children to love (*Tom Sawyer, Under the Lilacs, An Old-Fashioned Girl*) but they found them old fashioned and dense. Is there a time when writing becomes too archaic for modern "sensibilities?" (*Judy Wood*)
3. *Judy Catterton* echoes this more bluntly: Is this novel out-of-date? Why is it still considered a classic? Or should it be?
4. What I loved was seeing how PLOTTED this novel was: in almost every chapter either a new character was introduced or something happened to move the plot forward (I wanted all my novel writers to read it for this reason alone!). In this sense (along with the short chapters) the book felt very modern. But the book felt slow, cumbersome at times. Were there too many characters? Too many plots? If we were workshopping this novel, who or what would we cut...or would you argue that every character and plot twist was ultimately necessary? (And yes, yes, I know it's presumptuous to even think about workshopping Jane Austen!) (*Maribeth Fischer*)
5. Many scholars believe the novel was initially written in epistolary form, and the final edition has more than twenty references to letters. Do the letters further the novel's plot and characterizations, and if so, how? (*Deborah Baker*)
6. Austen's structure relies on dualities on many levels. She begins with her title, then proceeds to create two couples to illustrate her point. Both males of the two couples have had previous engagements, and both men ultimately issue apologies, albeit very differently...what other examples of dualities do you see and is there something we can learn from this technique? (*Deborah Baker*)
7. On **page 288** of my version of the book, I found this sentence, which felt like the author intruding into the story...*I come now to the relation of a misfortune which about this time befell Mrs. John Dashwood...*who is this I? (*Maribeth Fischer*)
8. How might you describe the humor that is said to be in it? (*Judy Catterton*) Notice Judy's use of "said to be" in it. Did you find the book humorous? (*Maribeth Fischer*)