



Northanger Abbey **Week 2 Lesson Plans:**

Introductions (10 minutes)

Ask participants to share something they found surprising while finishing Volume I.

Muslin (20 minutes)

Provide Context:

Display the first slide on the “Muslin in India” map on the “Volume I” website page to give an introduction to the muslin trade and the East India Company. Explain that muslin was a textile imported to England from India by the East India Company, one of the world’s dominant trading organizations.

To show how the East India Company symbolized British economic and military power, display the “New East-India Docks” newspaper article on the “East India Docks” slide of the “Muslin in London” map.

Ask for a volunteer to read the article aloud.

New East India Docks

“The Grand-Gate, on the land-side, was open for the reception of visitors at half-past eleven, and by one, the place was crowded with genteel company . . . The Company's band were on [a ship's] quarter-deck, playing "Rule Britannia," and the crowded assembly of elegant company, who thronged all her decks, cheered repeatedly, in return to the loud and continual huzzas from the shore . . . The whole of this truly gratifying spectacle concluded at nearly

four o'clock, to the evident but inexpressible satisfaction of the multitude collected to view an exhibition so intimately connected with the trade and commerce, the stability and glory, of this great maritime and commercial nation." – From the August 05, 1806 issue of the *London Times*

Discussion questions on the article:

- According to the article, why is the event so spectacular? Why is the East India Company and its new docks something to be celebrated?

Discussion questions on *Northanger Abbey*:

On page 16, Henry Tilney boasts about the fact that he purchased “true India muslin” for a cheap price.

- Why is Henry so proud to own and recognize “true India muslin?”

Bath Streets (5-10 minutes)

Provide Context:

The specific locations that characters choose to spend their time reveal facets of their personality.

Display various slides on the “Muslin in Bath” map, specifically the Milsom Street and Pulteney Street slides.

For example, the Tilneys live on Milsom Street, which was the center of Bath’s shopping district.

In a Bath guidebook titled *Walks Through Bath*, Pierce Egan describes Milsom Street as the “pulse” of Bath society.

When the Allens and Catherine arrive in Bath, they live on Pulteney Street. In contrast to his description of Milsom Street, Pierce Egan’s description of Pulteney Street displays it as a drab place. Egan writes that “In starting from Great Pulteney-Street, [a] visitor will, for a moment, turn aside from the mansions of fashion and elegance, to take a cursory view of the abode of depravity and misconduct, in order to render the view of this highly-famed city complete and impartial”

Discussion Questions:

- What does the contrast between Milsom Street and Pulteney Street tell us about each family and their position within Bath society?

City Fashion (10 minutes)

Provide Context:

In many locations in Bath, fashion is a major concern.

*Display the excerpt from *The Mirror* under the "Volume I" tab of the website.*

In *Northanger Abbey*, a trip to the city is often equated with a young woman's entry into society. *The Mirror* seems to portray the city in a much different way, framing cities' fashion as a threat to both country and religion. Fashion is not only frivolous, but capable of making young women prefer French phrases to English and doubt the immortality of the soul. It will, as the author writes, "bring our estates to market, our daughters to ruin, and our sons to the gallows" [82].

Discussion Questions:

- Despite extensive caution in *The Mirror*, which we later learn Mrs. Morland has read, why might she remain "wholly unsuspecting" of the city's threat to Catherine's morality [9]?

Ball Etiquette (10 minutes)

Provide Context:

Balls are one of the places where we see courtship culture play out in the novel, and each character seems to approach the matter a bit differently. For example, initially, Catherine cannot decline John Thorpe's invitation to dance at the ball because she's flattered to be asked and looks forward to being publicly "engaged" [33]. Later in the novel, she avoids Thorpe at a ball and longs to dance with Henry: on page 52, the narrator says, "For though she could not, dared not expect that Mr. Tilney should ask her a third time to dance, her wishes, hopes and plans all centered in nothing less. Every young lady may feel for my heroine in this critical moment, for every young lady has at some time or other known the same agitation. All have been, or at least all have believed themselves to be, in danger from the pursuit of some one whom they

wished to avoid; and all have been anxious for the attentions of some one whom they wished to please” [52].

Isabella, on the other hand, refuses to dance with James Morland a second time, implying that it would be inappropriate in terms of manners and morals: on page 39, Isabella says, “I tell you, Mr. Morland,’ she cried, ‘I would not do such a thing for all the world. How can you be so teasing; only conceive, my dear Catherine, what your brother wants me to do. He wants me to dance with him again, though I tell him that it is a most improper thing, and entirely against the rules. It would make us the talk of the place, if we were not to change partners” [39].

Discussion Questions:

- Think about the ways in which different characters view ball culture. Compare and contrast Isabella and Catherine.
- What does Catherine's approach have to do with the fact that she is a "heroine in training?" Do other characters “train” Catherine to enjoy balls?
- Does Catherine’s view of balls change throughout the novel?
- Is there anything ironic in Isabella’s strict adherence to ballroom etiquette?

Courtship Culture (10 minutes)

Provide context:

Later in the novel, Henry Tilney sarcastically describes a contractual understanding of courtship rituals while dancing with Catherine at a ball.

Discussion Questions:

- Why does Tilney make this parallel between dancing and courtship?
- Do you think that this metaphor is appropriate?
- Even though Tilney is clearly being sarcastic here, often times, courtship culture does commodify women, as men seem to believe that they “own” a woman after courting her. Does Austen seem to subscribe to courtship culture, reject it, or both?

Reading Practices (10 minutes)

Provide context:

Northanger Abbey is famous for its defense of the novel, but it also mocks its naive heroine who sometimes fails to differentiate between fact and fiction [77]. Often, Austen both mocks and defends female readers at the same time.

Discussion Questions:

- What do the reading practices of the following characters tell us about them?
 - Catherine: “The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars and pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all--it is very tiresome: and yet I often think it odd that it should be so dull, for a great deal of it must be invention” [79].
 - John Thorpe: “Novels are all so full of nonsense and stuff; there has not been a tolerably decent one come out since *Tom Jones*, except *The Monk*; I read that t’other day; but as for all the others, they are the stupidest things in creation” [32].
 - Isabella: “Dear creature! How much I am obliged to you; and when you have finished *Udolpho*, we will read *The Italian* together; and I have made out a list of ten or twelve more of the same kind for you” [25].
 - Henry: “The person, be it gentleman or lady, who has not pleasure in a good novel, must be intolerably stupid. I have read all Mrs. Radcliffe’s works, and most of them with great pleasure. *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, when I had once begun it, I could not lay down again; I remember finishing it in two days—my hair standing on end the whole time” [77].

Catherine’s Developing Judgment (10 minutes)

Provide context:

Read aloud the passage on page 47 beginning with “Little as Catherine was in the habit...” and ending with “...giving universal pleasure.”

Discussion Questions:

- What do we learn about Catherine’s developing sense of independent thought and judgment here?
- How is Catherine learning to think for herself?

Provide context:

Read aloud the passage on page 79 beginning with “Catherine looked grave...” and ending with “...admire, as what she did.”

Though Henry is joking, there is something sinister in the situation, especially because the last paragraph shows Catherine’s eagerness to trust Henry’s judgment.

Discussion Questions:

- How is this passage different from Catherine’s judgment of John Thorpe?
- What or who is Austen satirizing here?
- What does this passage tell us about Henry?

Provide context:

Last week, we talked a bit about the debate over whether Austen is a feminist or not (Of course, using the term loosely, since she was writing in the early days of feminism just after Mary Wollstonecraft wrote her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.) Some readers observe passages like the one on page 76 (“A woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing any thing, should conceal it as well as she can... a good looking girl, with an affectionate heart and a very ignorant mind, cannot fail of attracting a clever young man.”) and conclude that Austen wants women to cater to men by being inferior in intellect, or at least pretending to be.

Discussion Question:

- Does Austen want us to admire Catherine for her ignorance, or does she want us to question it?