

Sense and Sensibility

1. Austen's narrator tends to point the blame for Mr. John Dashwood's selfish nature at his wife Fanny. Do you believe that Fanny is to blame for her husband's actions? Can a husband or wife be responsible for a spouse's actions?
2. From the first chapter of the novel, Elinor is portrayed as representing "sense" and Marianne as representing "sensibility." How do you think this dichotomy evolved? Do you think that birth order has shaped these siblings' familial roles? If so, how? Are there times in the novel when the two sisters transcend these roles? Which of the sisters would you want as a personal friend, and why?
3. Mrs. Jennings is determined to "marry off" the Dashwood sisters who are still teenagers. Today, in most Western nations, teenagers are perceived as too young or immature for marriage. Do you think, by the end of the novel, that Elinor or Marianne possesses the maturity for marriage? What do you consider the "ideal age" for marriage in contemporary times, and why?
4. Austen portrays a world where issues of love and marriage are directly linked to issues of financial independence. Do we still live in such a world? Which characters in the novel seem to embrace, and which seem to reject, these links?
5. Marianne critiques her sister's interest in Edward by saying, "He admires as a lover, not as a connoisseur." What prevents Marianne from acknowledging Edward's good points? Do you think her feelings are hypocritical, considering her romantic nature and willingness to accept the path where passion leads her? Why or why not?
6. Colonel Brandon is described as being "on the wrong side of five-and-thirty," and is criticized by Marianne as "old enough to be my father." What experiences or revelations lead Marianne to eventually look beyond Col. Brandon's "advanced age"?
7. Initially, Marianne devoutly believes in the notion of love at first sight and does not believe in "second attachments," or the possibility of falling in love more than once in one's life. How are second attachments perceived in the novel? What do you think Austen is saying about people's ability to "start over"?

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8. At the end of *Sense and Sensibility*, we are to assume that Marianne is happily married to Col. Brandon. Is Marianne's marriage to Col. Brandon a sign of her maturation or a sign of her compromising her passionate ways? If she had the opportunity to reunite with Willoughby, what do you think she would do?
9. The film of *Sense and Sensibility* opens with a scene that is very different than the first scene in the novel. Why do you think the director chose to open the film with the cryptic romantic scene and the subsequent clash between Brandon and Willoughby? How does this choice frame viewers' perceptions of the rest of the story?

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