

**Session ONE:** Mansfield Park, Vol I and Vol 2 through chap 5.

Volume 1:

1. Why begin with the past of the 3 Ward sisters: Lady Bertram, Mrs. Norris, and Mrs. Price? How do you think the structure of the Ward sisters relates to the Bertram family and adopted child family? Has the past had an influence on the present?
2. We don't learn much about Fanny's background until Vol 3, but we do learn a bit. What is important about what we do learn and why might Austen have withheld her full description of the Price family in Portsmouth until when she did include it? (We might hold a full discussion for our second session.)
3. What is the effect of adoption on Fanny? (Biographical note: Austen's second brother was given away to a wealthy family, the Knights, who needed an heir. Austen was welcomed at their large estate and may have modeled Mansfield Park on it.)
4. Consider the issue of upbringing for Maria, Julia, and Fanny. Who brings each up and with what values? Consider the same question for Tom Bertram and Edmund Bertram? Then for Henry and Mary Crawford? In Vol 3, for Susan and Betsy Price? To what extent and in what ways does upbringing matter—or not?
5. Parenting—Are Sir Thomas, Lady Bertram, Mrs. Norris and Mrs. Price equally poor parents?
6. Speaking truthfully—Does anyone in the novel speak truthfully to anyone else? If so, who and why? if not, why not? Consider Fanny and Edmund, Fanny and Mary Crawford, Mary Crawford and Edmund, Henry Crawford and Mary Crawford, Mrs. Norris and Sir Thomas.
7. The three episodes that are central to discuss in Vol 1 are the riding lesson (chap. 7), the visit to Sotherton (chap 8-10), and *Lovers' Vows* (chap.13-esp. 16 and 18)—its selection, the casting, the rehearsals, the upshot. (I'm sure you will notice the symbolism of the wicket gate and fences at Sotherton.)

**In Vol 2**, pay attention to **Fanny as onlooker** (chap 4) and the **dinner at the Grants** (chap. 5). What do we learn about the major characters, esp. the Crawfords, Maria, Fanny and Edmund from these scenes ?



SESSION TWO: The rest of *Mansfield Park*! Rest of Vol II and Vol III.

1. What does **duty** mean to Mrs. Norris? Sir Thomas? Edmund? Tom Bertram? Maria & Julia? Fanny Price? Mary and Henry Crawford? **Duty vs. personal autonomy**—Are they in conflict? Is it possible to achieve both in the world of Mansfield Park?
2. Consider **how managing their estates reveals the character** of Sir Thomas (Mansfield Park), Mr. Rushworth (Sotherton), and Henry Crawford (Everingham). You could also look at Henry Crawford's vs Edmund Bertram's plans for Thornton Lacey (II,25), if you wish.
3. **Why include William Price**—he plays various functions in the novel: brother, sailor in the navy, Naval officer with his own command?
4. Describe the world of Mansfield Park vs. that of Portsmouth vs. what we hear of London/Brighton. What are the strengths and flaws of each. Each's effect on Fanny? In Vol III, Fanny, after returning to Portsmouth, is nostalgic for Mansfield Park. How accurate is her perception of it (III, viii) (chap. 39, 363).
5. Compare/contrast Mr. Collins from P&P to **the clergy** in Mansfield Park: Edmund, Mr. Norris (deceased but remembered), Mr. Grant, and the London clergy talked about by both Mary C and Henry C. Also discuss attitudes toward the clergy—Sir Thomas, Mary C, Henry C, Fanny, and any others.

6. To what extent and in what ways **does Edmund behave that is consistent with his principles** as a prospective Anglican clergyman (what are these?) and in what ways does he violate them?

7. **Is Edmund worth Fanny's devotion?** What are his strengths? His shortcomings?

8. Why is **Fanny so shy and timid, so non-assertive, so self-reproachful, so scared?** One early 20th century critic wrote: "Fiction holds no heroine more repulsive than Fanny Price in her cast-iron righteousness and steely rigidity of purpose" (Reginald Farrer in 1917 *Quarterly Review*). Since that time, she has been evaluated negatively and positively. It's almost like the blind men who attempt to describe an elephant by touch! None agree....nor, I bet, will we!

9. One critic, Auerbach, said that "None of the characters within the novel fall in love with her [Fanny Price]." Evaluate Henry C's "love" as well as "Edmund's"—is **either man in love with her?** What's your evidence for or against?

10. Characterize **Fanny's moral dilemmas**, her conflicts—internal primarily but also external.

11. Henry Crawford—his strengths? His shortcomings? Mary Crawford—her strengths? Her shortcomings?

12. C/C **the marriage plot** and your satisfaction with how it works out in P&P and MP.

13. The final chapter, the wrap up. Are you satisfied with the ending? Did you expect it when you first read Mansfield Park? Did Jane Austen fail here, or put differently, try to figure out what she might be saying to her readers with this ending and then consider/reconsider what she most wants you to understand in the novel.