

## *Northanger Abbey*—Volume 1—Topics Discussed

1. Did Austen intend to write a farce, and if so, did she succeed?
2. In first volume, is Henry Tilney patronizing, poking fun, or being kind to Catherine?
3. Mr. Allen—is he the hero?
4. Austen does a fine job of introducing each character but, with the exception of Catherine, don't they all stay static? Or does Henry also change?
5. Note that all the characters come in pairs (or triples)—: in what ways do they act as foils? Consider sibling relationships, older women role models (Mrs. Allen and Mrs. Thorpe), the three young women (Catherine, Isabella, Eleanor), the three young men (Henry, John, James).
6. If we were acquisition editors in 1803, wouldn't we too turn down publishing *Northanger Abbey* written by an unknown author?
7. The novel was written over approximately 20 years. How might the intervening years from when it was begun (1797), when it was bought (1803), and when it was published have had an impact on the text (1816)—in terms of style, structure, and timeliness?
8. Do we sense that Austen reworked some or all of *Northanger Abbey* —if so, what leads to that sense? [Caution—we have no textual evidence for #6-#8—but can speculate!].
9. Austen is not subtle about the qualities necessary for gentility, her lack of subtlety leading to a sense of its being an early novel. What are these qualities and which characters are ruled out?
10. Why does Austen present our heroine as being better at being a boy than a girl. Does she characterize Catherine as having been pushed into the cultural role of a girl?
11. The narrator of *Northanger Abbey* interjects her own views with a good deal of wit— does this style work? See especially chapter one (Catherine as heroine) and chapter ten (novel discussion).
12. Someone was struck by how quickly the women become “best friends forever.”
13. How has reading affected Catherine? (see especially chapter five)
14. What made many of you enjoy reading *Northanger Abbey* this time compared to when you read it at a much younger age?

15. One reason that *Northanger Abbey* seems like a first novel compared to her other novels is that she treats her villainous characters with a very heavy hand and makes them ultra-irritating. Compare her unsubtle treatment of the villains John & Isabella Thorpe to her somewhat more subtle treatment of Fredrick Tilney and General Tilney (in volume 2).
16. Compare Catherine to Austen's other heroines (in final discussion).
17. What do Catherine and Henry see and appreciate in the other?
18. Is Catherine/Henry's relationship more than a "crush," an "infatuation" in volume one?  
Can it be called "love"?
19. What does James see in John Thorpe?
20. At what point and why does Catherine begin to grow up and recognize her point-of-view as a woman is valid. Does she shed her literalism in volume one?
21. What are the satiric targets in the novel beyond gothic novels, trivial social pursuits and social formalities? (the list could be quite long!)
22. Is this a courtship novel or a coming-of-age novel or...?
23. Is satirizing propriety an appropriate topic for a woman in Austen's era—or is the novel a "safe space" for female authorship and readers because one can say something on the printed page that one cannot say out loud.