*Emma* Reading Questions

Volume I: Chapters 1-18

1. How is Emma Woodhouse characterized in the novel’s opening sentence?

2. Mr. Woodhouse says, “Emma never thinks of herself if she can do good to

others…” (p.10). Does Emma’s father intend this as a positive or negative characterization?

How might Mr. Knightley interpret it? What is significant in Austen’s word choice here?

3. What is Emma’s purpose in befriending Miss Smith? What might Harriet represent

to her? Discuss.

4. Mr. Knightley says, “Emma is spoiled by being the cleverest of her family” (p. 31).

What does he mean? In what ways might Emma’s intelligence be a hindrance?

5. Mr. Knightley admits, “I have a very sincere interest in Emma. . . . There is an

anxiety, a curiosity in what one feels for Emma” (p. 34). What might the reader be led to believe about Knightley’s feelings toward Emma?

6. Compare Robert Martin’s letter (p. 43) to Phillip Elton’s riddle (p. 61). Why might Emma prefer the “Charade”?

7. Harriet is astonished by Emma’s vow to remain single (p. 74). How is her reaction a reflection of the time and society in which they live?

8. What might be the cause of Mr. Woodhouse’s hypochondria and fears? Explain.

9. What is the nature of Mrs. Churchill’s power over Frank?

10. Why are the villagers so fascinated with Frank Churchill?

Volume II: Chapters 1-18

1. Is Emma self-aware? List evidence for

both sides.

2. How is Jane Fairfax a character foil to

Emma Woodhouse?

3. Why does Mrs. Weston warn Emma,

“You get upon delicate subjects, Emma. .

. . Mr. Frank Churchill hardly knows

what to say when you speak of Miss

Fairfax’s situation in life. I will move a

little farther off” (p. 171). Why might

Mrs. Weston feel a connection to Jane?

4. Mr. Weston refers to Miss Bates as “a

standing lesson of how to be happy” (p.

218). What does he mean? How might

Mr. Weston’s comment reflect Austen’s

purpose?

5. Mrs. Elton characterizes Emma as having

“lived so secluded a life” (p. 235). Is there

truth to her insult? Explain.

6. Emma takes great offense at Mrs. Elton’s

reference to George as “Knightley” (p.

238). What is the implied reason for

Emma’s reaction? What might be an

inferred reason?

7. Mrs. Elton officiously professes that she

will help advance Jane Fairfax, to “bring

her forward” (p. 241). How different is

her motivation, if at all, from Emma’s

vow to “improve” Harriet Smith? (p. 19).

Explain.

8. In describing Jane, Mr. Knightley reflects,

“She is reserved; more reserved, I think,

than she used to be; and I love an open

temper” (p. 247). What deeper comparison

might Mr. Knightley be making

here? Is he a bit “clueless,” too?

9. What does Mr. Weston mean when he

says of Mrs. Churchill, “She was nobody

when he married her, barely the daughter

of a gentleman; but ever since her being

turned into a Churchill, she has out-

Churchilled them all . . .“ (p. 265). How

might Mr. Weston’s description give a

voice to Austen’s ideas about class?

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10. Explain the irony in Mrs. Elton’s statement:

“I have quite a horror of upstarts….

giving themselves immense airs and

expecting to be on a footing with the old

established families” (pp. 265-66).

Volume III: Chapters 1-19

1. Explain the irony in Mrs. Elton’s sending

the carriage after Jane and Miss Bates,

then assuring Mrs. Weston that she’ll

“always take care of them” (p. 277).

2. Both Mrs. Elton (p. 276) and Miss Bates

(p. 278) talk non-stop to other characters

upon arriving at the Crown Inn. What is

a marked difference in the nature of their

chatter? What purpose does Austen

intend in these contrasting monologues?

3. In what ways is the ball at the Crown Inn

a turning point for Emma?

4. How might Austen feel about Regency

Era gypsies? What evidence supports

your answer?

5. What is the significance in Harriet’s and

Emma’s differing recollections of the

spruce beer conversation (p. 292)? Why

does Austen draw this contrast?

6. Emma characterizes Mr. Knightley’s

Donwell home as “just what it ought to

be, and it looked what it was” (pp. 308-

09). Is this also a fitting characterization

of the home’s owner? Explain.

7. Explain the meaning of Franks’s exclamation:

“I sick of prosperity and indulgence!

You are quite mistaken. I do not look

upon myself as either prosperous or

indulged. I am thwarted in everything

material. I do not consider myself at all a

fortunate person” (p. 315). Why is Frank

so frustrated? Who or what is the cause of

his dissatisfaction?

8. Mr. Knightley lectures Emma (p. 324),

telling her she should model proper

behavior for others. Why? Is Mr. Knightley

a model? Explain.

9. Mr. Knightley proclaims to Emma “the

beauty of truth and sincerity in all our

dealings with each other” (p. 385). Can

his words be applied to characters other

than their own? Might Mr. Knightley

serve as Jane Austen’s voice here? Explain.

10. To “thoroughly understand, her own

heart” becomes Emma’s “first endeavor”

(p. 355). How has she changed since the

beginning of the novel? What actions

support this change?