

Student Jane Doe
TEXT SET—Jane Austen for Real People
Reading and Literacy in the Content Areas
Professor Page
October 24, 2007

Jane Austen for Real People

When trying to think of a topic for a creative, useful, and fun text set, I was somewhat beside myself. Of course, for English majors, this assignment would be fairly easy because we could choose almost any literary topic, but that freedom can create a lot of anxiety. My first thought was to do Shakespeare, but since Shakespeare was an example used in the reading I had to go a step further to show how I can *apply* my knowledge of how a text set works, not just regurgitate information I have read. My next thought was to do Hispanic Literature since I love all kinds of multicultural literature—especially finding new material, but then realized I should probably learn to work with the texts I will be required to teach and use in my first classroom—“boring” classics with not a lot of diversity. I finally came to the decision that I should try a text set for Jane Austen’s work because many schools have invested in her literature but few students actually develop a passion for Austen by solely reading Pride and Prejudice cover to cover. Because Pride and Prejudice was a required text I struggled to read even as an Honors English student, I figured it would be useful to find fun supplementary material that could help even the most hesitant reader enjoy a unit on this “boring” classic English author. Although it is more than two hundred years after Jane Austen’s time, there is a cult-like following of her era that surfaced in the 1990’s and has created some really fun supplementary materials that a class could read. In this rejuvenated Jane Austen culture, people have dedicated museums, vacations, estates, and even dress up to role play characters of her novels just to get a step closer to what it must have been like to live in her time. By reading basic plot guides such as Cliffsnote along with some of these more unique historical recounts I have found, students will gain an understanding and even possibly a passion for this old-fashioned way of words.

1) COLLECTION OF QUOTES

Baji, Karin, & Holms, John P. (1999). *Bite-Size Jane Austen: Sense & Sensibility from One of England’s Greatest Writers*. New York: St. Martin’s Press.

RL: 9 (FRY)

This collection of quotes from Austen’s novels really simplifies her best moments in writing without having students plow through the main text to find them. They are presented in a bare-bones way in one to three sentences without requiring the reader to have any prior knowledge of a storyline, characters, or plot issues that relate to the quote. This is a really great miscellaneous info book for students to page through if they’re burned out on reading and are still having trouble understanding the big picture of Austen’s literature. The quotes are organized into little chapters such as “On Society,” “On Business and Politics,” and “On Family Matters,” so that students can understand the context the quotes are describing. An airy, simple style that grabs the reader when they least expect it.

The readability of this text is fairly basic except for the few large words in the actual basic quotes. Because of these large words the reading level was estimated at a ninth grade level using the FRY method, but I would rate it more at a 6 or 7 grade level. Most quotes are just one sentence that has a witty conclusion with clear one-to-two syllable words. Especially since they are just short quotes, the

reader does not have to have a long attention span in order to gain some Jane Austen words of wisdom. I included this collection of quotes because it would be a great “book” for an IEP or special needs student to still be able to do a project and discuss Jane Austen literature in a an Austen unit.

2) READING GUIDES (Supplementary Books)

**Kalil, Marie. (2000). *CliffsNotes Austen’s Pride and Prejudice*. Foster City: IDG Books Worldwide, Inc.
RL: 7 (FRY)**

This reading guide book serves as a supplement to the actual text of *Pride and Prejudice* for struggling readers to help them understand all aspects of the text. Inside this guide, there is everything a student could imagine explained in detail with very basic middle school language for those that have a lot of trouble deciphering Austen’s most famous text. There are even summaries, commentaries, and glossaries for each chapter of the book. For those that struggle with character development, there are character analyses, a short list of characters, and an actual relationships map drawn out to help students understand *Pride and Prejudice*. A basic style that is just a bit too basic...

The readability of this text is extremely basic and can help even the most discouraged reader. It is ideal for a struggling high school student that might not be willing or able to get through the social babble of the regular text and needs help with knowledge of the text to do an assignment or project. The only problem with this guide is that there are no pictures other than the character map and even this guide may seem daunting to someone who does not fancy reading. It is an “easy way out” and I would probably only use it in the most desperate of circumstances because I do not want to teach English students to “cheat” on their reading.

Bloom, Harold (Ed.). (2002). *Bloom’s BioCritiques JANE AUSTEN*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers.

RL: 12 (FRY)

This is another reading guide for a Jane Austen unit and would work well for a student who is a good reader, but who just cannot get into an Austen book. Although this guide is a bit more advanced and lengthy than the CliffsNotes guide, it helps a potential reader really explore what Austen did in her lifetime of writing literature. The focus of the supplement collection is on Austen’s biography rather than her story, and really digs deep to uncover theories on her life and writing. There are several scholarly articles that pick Austen apart as a writer using literary critiques which may be pretty confusing, but maybe an advanced reader with a questionable attitude to picking up the regular text would have fun with this text. Overall I would say that this was a very dry, scholarly book that someone interested in writing a research paper on Austen would need. To put it literally, the style was “out” many years ago in education.

The readability of this text is very low although it contains a lot of useful information. I included it to show those who finish the book early what they would work on in college if they chose an English major that focused on an Austen-era novel. It would be fun to have a gifted student that finished early give the rest of the class a report on what they thought of this supplementary criticism book and whether or not they felt it as helpful--to have the students on the evaluation side of the learning process as well.

3) PICTURE BOOKS

Nicolson, Nigel. (1991). *The World of Jane Austen*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

RL: 6 (FRY)

This text is awesome for visually-stimulated students that are bored by Austen's dry text on social expectations. It has a lot of white space for students to explore the countryside setting of Austen's world and novels to understand her story settings so they can paint their own pictures when they go back and try to read the actual book. There are several chapters on Austen's houses, several cities she lived in (Hampshire, Bath, Kent), and special chapters on important setting issues like architecture or the seaside. There are many full-page color photographs that beg the reader to explore the small paragraphs that tell the pictures' stories, coaxing a student into reading about Austen! The style shows the reader the "magical wonders of Jane Austen's surroundings" in such a way that the reader is persuaded to keep reading.

The readability is really great. I found myself drifting off task while looking through this text because the pictures were just SO beautiful. The photos of the actual houses Jane Austen lived in were very neat to look at and really stimulated my mind to think in different ways for the setting of the novel the next time I read one. I really liked the low grade level for reading so that students would trip on wordy phrases like what sometimes happens with extensive picture books. I included this text because I thought it would be important to have around to help students think beyond the plot and basic assignment questions while doing the unit.

Schemenauer, Elma. (2001). *England*. New York: The Child's World, Inc.

RL: 2 (FRY)

A very, very basic book explaining the country of England that would be great for non-readers or those with very low proficiency of English. It explains where the country of England is and shows pictures of the countryside that Jane Austen wrote in. Although very, almost too basic for literary comprehension, it provides a basic understanding to those struggling to read about where these books were written and what type of culture this literature is about. The maps are probably the most important part of the entire book because they show where England is located on a world map *and* in relation to the United States. The style is that of a book you would read to an elementary level student—explaining obvious terms and concepts thoroughly, but not a bad style to have around when needed.

Because the book is estimated using the FRY method at a second grade level, most or all of my Communications/English students would probably be able to comprehend this book—if not from the text then from the pictures. I included this because I think it is a necessity to prepare for non-readers or special education students.

4) HISTORICAL RECOUNT/VIGNETTE/HANDBOOK

Sullivan, Margaret C. (2007). *The Jane Austen Handbook: A Sensible Yet Elegant Guide to Her World*. Philadelphia: Quirk Books.

RL: 8 (FRY)

This text is my favorite of all I have found because it is so radically appropriate to the appeal of young junior high/high school students because it gives silly advice as to what to do in many social situations in

a comical way while getting students to learn. This culture guide written in a modern vernacular style really lets the reader laugh along with the text while still educating them. With sections titled “How to Become an Accomplished Lady,” “How to Become Known as a Valuable Neighbor,” and “How to Ride Sidesaddle,” the reader becomes educated in Jane Austen’s culture while laughing at the absurd directions on social behavior. The sections get better as the book goes on with “How to Keep a House,” “How to Indicate Interest in a Gentleman Without Seeming Forward,” and the ever hilarious “How to Marry Off Your Daughter” that includes “threatening her if necessary” as a step to success.

I included it in my text set because I really feel this text reaches secondary students on their level and can keep interest long enough for a student to read through at least one section. Its readability gets an A+ for the use of humor to help learning. I could have the students work in small groups to present the rules and steps to success in Jane Austen’s world so it could be used as a resource for giving speeches as well as writing essays.

5) BROCHURE

(Nonperiodical Web Document.)

The Jane Austen Centre. (n.d.). *The Jane Austen Centre: Celebrating Bath’s Most Famous Resident*. October 23, 2007. <http://www.janeausten.co.uk/images/webcopy.pdf>

RL: 7 (FRY)

This is my second favorite text that I have found because it is just so weird but appropriate to get kids to read up on Jane Austen. It describes and shows many different examples of her world—both in text and in pictures. This brochure shows people in costume, pictures of food to be eaten during “tea,” and explains customs to be experienced on tours offered. I like using an advertisement because if it wasn’t easy to read then people probably wouldn’t have spent money producing it so it has to be aesthetically pleasing and informative reading so the consumer is informed on how wonderful it would be to spend money on this organization/museum. The style of this text is almost too cheesy with its embellishing language, but it works at keeping attention and interest.

I like this text because it is very “readable” due to the fact that it comes in the form of an advertisement through the most popular media of the secondary age group—the internet. I can have the students read through this brochure and write a response as to how it makes them feel. If they like it and feel they want to go on the tour or if they feel it is a “fake rip-off” of Jane Austen culture and *explain why* using examples from what they have learned during the Jane Austen unit.

6) LETTERS

Austen, Jane. *Jane Austen’s Letters To Her Sister Cassandra and Others*. Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library. October 23, 2007.

<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/AusLett.html>

RL: 10 (FRY)

This collection of letters through an electronic text library is very modern and also a very interesting find. In reading through her letters we see that even while socially communicating with a close friend she writes wordy, confusing sentences much like those in her novels. There are also some comical references to a “young Irishman” and how she was being too forward with him in public. The personal appeal of letters written by the same author and the drama of her personal affairs can really draw

secondary students in and have them realize that they are not as different as they thought they were from Ms. Austen. As an informal letter style, the kids might enjoy reading text that has not been edited over again and again, and that they might have to figure out on their own. The only issue I might have with this text is that it would probably work best with advanced readers because of the fact that the sentences are wordy and the reading level is fairly high.

I can use these letters for many projects—especially one involving exploring personal voice and style and asking my students whether or not they write differently for school than for emails/and electronic messages (texts, IMs). It can be another project that will relate to the Communications process as a whole while focusing on an important literature unit.

7) BIOGRAPHY

The Jane Austen Society of North America, Inc. *Jane Austen (1775-1817): A Brief Biography*. October 23, 2007. http://www.jasna.org/info/about_austen.html

RL: 8 (FRY)

This is a very basic one-to-two page biography of Jane Austen. It includes pictures and has very basic language that explains her origins and where her literary life took her. There are many little-known facts about her life—especially that she wrote under a pen name. The text flows fairly well and most students would be able to get through a short passage like this and review it due to the pictures and short language. I like the amount of white space and a web page is always a bit more aesthetically pleasing than a plain boring sheet of text—especially since computers are involved. The style of this text is one that a person would find on an introductory webpage, not too advanced but not too simple—a middle of the range reading for a biography.

I chose this piece because although many of the texts I chose for this text set have mini-biographies somewhere in them, it is important to offer students something that they will probably read. This has pictures and decipherable language as well as other resources to look up if the students are so inclined. If students get bored while being asked to read the page, they can just surf www.jasna.org for other information on Jane Austen so they would still be learning about her but in a multimedia attention-getting way.

8) MAP

<http://maps.google.com>

RL: NA—all proper nouns!

This is an interactive site where students could “Google” Jane Austen’s towns and see where they are in relation to England and Europe as a whole. To actually see how far away each of the towns they lived in and how long the journeys must have taken to towns they visited (characters in Austen’s books do A LOT of traveling). Although not as important or literature-based as the other sources, I thought this would be an important thing to include for KT learners that have a lot of trouble sitting still with a book. They could be looking at several different pages at once so they could play with a map of England when they feel restless and easily slip back into learning by clicking on a reading page. This is just a great resource for those students that really need a student-centered and friendly way to do their reading.