

Sense and Sensibility Discussion Questions

1. In this novel Austen parodies the 18th-century cult of sensibility, which valued strong emotions over reason and intellect. Consider the significance of the novel's title. How are the qualities of sense and sensibility represented in the main characters? [note: The 18th-century Cult of Sensibility was a cultural and literary movement that celebrated intense emotional responsiveness and the capacity for feeling, particularly in response to beauty, art, and the natural world. It emerged as a reaction to the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason and intellectualism, highlighting the importance of emotions and empathy in human experience.]

2. Discuss the entailment of Norland, the Dashwood estate. Could the Dashwood sisters' father have done more to provide for the future of his wife and daughters? What is Mrs. Dashwood's response to their new economic situation?

3. What was Marianne's attraction to Willoughby? What were her opinions of Colonel Brandon, Edward Ferrars? What was Elinor's assessment of all these gentlemen?

4. What was your opinion of the Steele sisters? Comic relief, maybe? Why was Lucy so eager to confide in Elinor?

5. Marianne makes plain that she does not believe a person can be in love more than once in his or her life. She says further, "At my time of life, opinions are tolerably fixed. It is not likely that I should see or hear anything to change them." Discuss the irony implicit in Marianne's statement.

6. How does Jane Austen use money to reveal character? What does Austen suggest about money and its role in the marriage market through her characters? Does the pursuit of wealth diminish a person's moral integrity?

7. What is the role of sincerity, speaking honestly and directly? Role of reserve? How much should be openly and honestly expressed. What sort of things should remain unspoken in Austen's world in *Sense & Sensibility*? What is the cost of hiding one's feelings? Of having strong feelings?

8. In the end, does sense triumph over sensibility? Or do you think Austen is sympathetic to both perspectives? What does each sister come to learn from the other?