

COMPANY OF FOOLS

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Study Guide



By
Lauren Gunderson & Margot Melcon

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WELCOME TO COMPANY OF FOOLS

Dear Educator,

Company of Fools is pleased to offer you this study guide to prepare you and your students for our performance of *MISS BENNET: CHRISTMAS AT PEMBERLEY*, by Lauren Gunderson and Margot Melcon. Working with schools is a fundamental part of Company of Fools' and the Sun Valley Center for the Arts' mission.

We hope this study guide will serve as a useful resource for you as educators and parents. It is designed to enhance student learning both before and after the performance, to support your classroom lesson plans and deepen the educational value of your students' experience. The resources and activities in this study guide support the Idaho Content Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy for grades 8–12.

Thank you for the sharing the magic of performing arts with your students!

—Company of Fools



CONTENT ADVISORY: *None*

RECOMMENDED AGE: *This production is appropriate for audiences 10 years of age and older.*

APPROXIMATE RUN TIME: *Miss Bennet is approximately 2 hours and 15 minutes including one 15 minute intermission.*

ABOUT THE PLAY: A Note from the Director, Scott Palmer, Producing Artistic Director



MISS BENNET: CHRISTMAS AT PEMBERLEY has become an international run-away smash, with hundreds of productions performed across the globe since its first performance in 2016. There is good reason why; *Miss Bennet* fulfills almost every wish you could have for a holiday show!

Glorious costumes, delightful banter, witty characters, romantic confusion, posh scenic design, theatrical magic, a deep holiday spirit, and a very happy ending—literally the definition of the perfect Christmas show!

But underneath all of this sparkle and charm lies the heart and soul of Jane Austen. As an “imagined sequel” to Austen’s most popular novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Miss Bennet* truly is a remarkable piece of dramatic literature. The playwrights, Lauren Gunderson and Margot Melcon, have accomplished something quite rare in the world of drama—they have written a play that relies on Austen’s style, wit, and insights while also creating an entirely original plot for these beloved characters. Gunderson and Melcon have done so in such a way that most audiences feel that they have simply put down *Pride and Prejudice* and, in the next breath, picked up Austen’s sequel; so completely and brilliantly did the playwrights capture the spirit of Jane Austen.

But more than that, *Miss Bennet* captures Austen’s sense of social justice, hope, and passion for equality. Austen was far more than just a Regency-era novelist; she was a social critic and a moral thinker. Her works asked deep questions about English social classes, about the role of women in 19th Century British society, and gave a voice to women in an age where strong, thoughtful, powerful women were rarely granted the spotlight. In *Miss Bennet*, Gunderson and Melcon focus their attention on perhaps the least-known of all the Bennet children, the middle sister Mary. Bookish, serious, and (to use a modern term) nerdy, Mary is the less developed of the Bennet sisters, and she often FEELS that she is—in comparison to her “beautiful and witty” older sisters, and her party-girl younger sister, Mary is almost predestined to be a spinster and lives her life in the shadow of Lizzie and Jane, and under the pressure of her family’s expectations and those of the world around her. This enchanting exploration of one of western literature’s most overlooked heroines is a celebration of love, family, and faith in yourself.

What I love most about *Miss Bennet* isn’t that it feels so authentically “Austen,” nor is it that the dialogue is so delightful, nor is it because I love a good, old-fashioned period piece. I do love all of those things, but what I love MOST is what *Miss Bennet* says to contemporary audiences: that Austen is for everyone (no matter your age, gender, or ethnicity) and that no matter who you are, or who people expect you to be, being your true, authentic self is the way to happiness.

What better message at this festive season? Love yourself and you are loved.

Welcome to the party, friends, and happiest of holidays to you and yours—no matter who you are.



JANE AUSTEN & THE REGENCY PERIOD

JANE AUSTEN

The Regency period of Jane Austen's time provided a picture of England during the reign of Prince Regent George Augustus Frederick, who was appointed to his father, King George III. Beginning in 1811 and lasting until the Prince Regent became King in 1820, the Regency became a label for a period of great patronage in the arts. Jane Austen published all of her novels during the Regency.

Jane Austen was an English novelist whose books, set among the English middle and upper classes, are notable for their wit, social observation and insights into the lives of early 19th century women. Austen was born on 16 December 1775 in the village of Steventon in Hampshire. She was one of eight children of a clergyman and grew up in a close-knit family. She began to write as a teenager. In 1801 the family moved to Bath. After the death of Jane's father in 1805 Jane, her sister Cassandra and their mother moved several times eventually settling in Chawton, near Steventon.

Jane's brother Henry helped her negotiate with a publisher and her first novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, appeared in 1811. Her next novel *Pride and Prejudice*, which she described as her "own darling child" received highly favorable reviews. *Mansfield Park* was published in 1814, then *Emma* in 1816. *Emma* was dedicated to the prince regent, an admirer of her work. All of Jane Austen's novels were published anonymously.



REGENCY CHRISTMAS TRADITION



“ I remember we had a discussion that time as to what was the great point and crowning glory of Christmas. Many were for mince-pie; some for the beef and plum-pudding; more for the wassail-bowl; a maiden lady timidly said the mistletoe; but we agreed at last, that although all these were prodigious, and some of them exclusively belonging to the season, the fire was the great indispensable. Upon which we all turned our faces towards it and began warming our already scorched hands. A great blazing fire, too big, is the visible heart and soul of Christmas. You may do without beef and plum-pudding; even the absence of mince-pie may be tolerated; there must be a bowl, poetically speaking, but it need not be absolutely wassail. The bowl may give place to the bottle. But a huge, heaped-up, over heaped-up, all-attracting fire, with a semicircle of faces about it, is not to be denied us. It is the lar and genius of the meeting; the proof positive of the season; the representative of all our warm emotions and bright thoughts; the glorious eye of the room; the inciter to mirth, yet the retainer of order; the amalgamator of the age and sex; the universal relish. Tastes may differ even on a mince-pie; but who gainsays a fire? The absence of other luxuries still leaves you in possession of that; but ‘Who can hold a fire in his hand with thinking on the frostiest twelfth-cake?’ ”

— a contributor to the *New Monthly Magazine*,
December 1, 1825

JANE AUSTEN & THE REGENCY PERIOD continued



REGENCY CHRISTMAS TREES

In 1800, Queen Charlotte, the German-born wife of King George III and mother of the Prince Regent, placed a decorated yew tree in Queen's Lodge, Windsor, for the children of leading families. She had also arranged a 'pyramid of toys upon the table' to hand out as gifts. Dr. John Watkins, the Queen's biographer, wrote the following description:

In the middle of the room stood an immense tub with a yew tree placed in it, from the branches of which hung bunches of sweetmeats, almonds, and raisins in papers, fruits and toys, most tastefully arranged, and the whole illuminated by small wax candles. After the company had walked around and admired the tree, each child obtained a portion of the sweets which it bore together with a toy and then all returned home, quite delighted.

—Windsor Castle and the Christmas Tree

REGENCY CHRISTMAS GAMES

THE TOILETTE

One player takes the role of Lord or Lady. The rest of the players take on the name of some article requisite for "the toilette," such as comb, curling-irons, powder-puff, mirror, etc. The Lord or Lady will call for some article. The player who is that article trades places with the Lord or Lady and the play continues. If a player does not jump when called or forgets their article, a forfeit is paid. For variety, the Lord or Lady may call 'All my toilette' and everyone must jump up and change seats (and take the toilette article of the player who had been in that seat). The player remaining without a seat becomes the Lord or Lady and play continues. The players must not forget the change of names which takes place, otherwise they are subject to a forfeit. The quicker the game is played the more the fines will be multiplied.

HOW D'YE DO? HOW D'YE DO?

The players stand up in a circle. The first person begins jumping up and down in the stiffest manner possible, holding their head up high in front of another player crying, "How d'ye do, How d'ye do, How d'ye do, How d'ye do?" The other jumps in the same manner, cries, "Tell me who, Tell me who, Tell me who, Tell me who," The first person then names another of the party, stops jumping, and resumes his place in the circle. 'Tell me Who' then jumps up to the person indicated, crying, "How d'ye do?" and the game continues making sure to include every player in the activity.

BLIND MAN'S BLUFF

Many variations of this game existed, including Hot Cockles, Are You There Moriarty, and Buffy Gruffy. All the variations include one player being blindfolded and trying to guess the identity of another player who had tapped them or who they have caught. A great deal of cheating was generally involved, which only added to the sport.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER BEFORE SEEING THE PLAY

1. How do literary classics such as the works by Jane Austen remain a cultural icon today?
2. How do issues of social justice and equality from Jane Austen's time remain relevant, or not, in today's society?
3. What modern cultural work, such as TV shows, books, or movies are comparable to Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* and how do they compare?



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AFTER SEEING THE PLAY

1. What themes do you recognize as most important in the play?
2. As an imagined sequel to *Pride and Prejudice*, how does the playwright uphold Austen's style and how does she address contemporary values and issues?
3. What would be an alternate ending to the play? How would that ending reinforce or challenge values from the Regency period or today's society?



WAYS TO ENGAGE STUDENTS AFTER SEEING THE PLAY ★ Teacher Tip!

Using the above questions as potential prompts, here are some ways to encourage further examination of the play-going experience.

EXPLORE

Write a scene, short play or story about equality or social justice
Write an alternative ending

ANALYZE

Draw a connection to a current event or cultural reference

INTERACT

Improvise scenes
Talk to others in your community about classic icons

CAST & CREATIVE TEAM:



* Member of Actor's Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States
 ** Member of United Scenic Artists, I.A.T.S.E. Local 829

CAST:

Jane Bingley..... Rachel Aanestad
 Anne De Bourgh Natalie Battistone*
 Elizabeth Darcy..... Cassandra Bissell*
 Charles Bingley..... Orion Bradshaw

Fitzwilliam Darcy Neil Brookshire*
 Arthur De Bourgh Chris Carwithen*
 Mary Bennet..... Kayla Kelly
 Lydia Wickham..... Alexis Ulrich*

CREATIVE TEAM:

Direction Scott Palmer
 Costume Design Melissa Heller
 Lighting Design..... Lynne Hartman**
 Production Stage Manager..... K.O. Ogilvie*
 Scenic Design Jesse Dreikosen

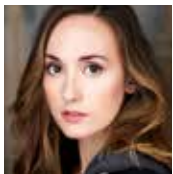
Production Assistant /Dramaturg Chris Henderson
 Dialect Coach Ann Price
 Stage Manager Tess Makena*
 Technical Director Patrick Szczotka



RACHEL AANESTAD

(Jane Bingley) is delighted to be making her debut with Company of Fools! She's a Ketchum native, recently returning to the valley after 15 years in Chicago. A few of

her favorite roles thus far include Sour Kangaroo (*Seussical the Musical*—St. Thomas Playhouse), Miss Jane (*Floyd Collins*—The Spot), Ginny (*The Trestle At Pope Lick Creek*—The Spot), and Catherine (*Proof*—The New Theatre Company). Rachel received her B.A. in Theatre Arts from University of Oregon, and also holds a B. Arch in Architecture from U.O. She is the architecture teacher and librarian at Sun Valley Community School. *She would like to thank her heroic family for supporting her in these theatrical adventures.*



NATALIE BATTISTONE

(Anne De Bourgh) an actor and director, has worked in the valley for the last five years, hailing originally from Connecticut. She made her directorial debut at CoF last

winter with *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* and is exceptionally grateful to be making her acting debut this year. Natalie works as a Creative Director for The Spot where she recently directed Gunderson's *The Revolutionists* and performed as Eurydice in *Eurydice*. MFA Acting: Harvard/American Repertory Theater/Moscow Art Theatre School.



CASSANDRA BISSELL

(Elizabeth Darcy) is delighted to return to Company of Fools, having appeared previously in *Constellations* and *Proof*. Regional (LORT) credits: Actors' Theatre of

Louisville, Arizona Theatre Company, Cleveland Play House, Court Theatre, Great Lakes Theater, Idaho Shakespeare Festival, Indiana Repertory, Milwaukee Repertory, Northlight Theatre, People's Light and the Utah Shakespeare Festival. Chicago (CAT) credits: Chicago Shakespeare Theater, First Folio, Rivendell Theatre and Steppenwolf. Small Professional Theatre (SPT)

credits: freeFall Theatre (St. Petersburg, FL), Next Act Theatre and Renaissance Theaterworks (Milwaukee, WI.) Resident Stock (CORST) credits: Peninsula Players (Door County, WI). Cassandra holds a BA in Gender Studies from the University of Chicago.



ORION BRADSHAW

(Charles Bingley) is an actor/educator, and a proud member of Actors' Equity and the National Education Association. He holds a BFA in Theatre Arts, and a

recently-received Master of Arts in Teaching degree from Southern Oregon University. Formerly an acting company member with the likes of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and Portland's Post 5 Theatre, and a theatre educator for companies such as the aforementioned OSF, Seattle Repertory Theatre, and Portland Center Stage, Orion truly believes that Education and Theatre make the perfect pair. *Happy holidays to all, and enjoy the show!*



NEIL BROOKSHIRE

(Fitzwilliam Darcy) previously with Company of Fools: *Constellations*, *Proof*, *Peter and the Starcatcher*, *Enchanted April*, and *Woman in Black*. A Wyoming native,

Neil earned a BA from Boise State University and an MFA in Acting from Northern Illinois University. Other theater credits: Great Lakes Theater, Boise Contemporary Theater, Idaho Dance Theatre, Opera Idaho, Seattle Novyi Theatre, People's Light, Cadence Theatre Co, Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival, Door Shakespeare, Renaissance Theaterworks, Peninsula Players, and ten seasons with the Idaho Shakespeare Festival. Neil is also a visual artist and founder of Dirt Hills Productions, which makes pictures and sounds.



CHRIS CARWITHEN

(Arthur De Bourgh) is a resident company artist with the Company of Fools. Since his Liberty Theatre debut in *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*, Chris has had the

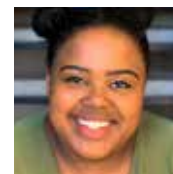
pleasure of performing on the John C. Glenn stage in productions such as *Good People*, *A Year with Frog and Toad*, *Almost, Maine*, *Grey Gardens*, *ART*, *Life Sucks*, *Striking 12*, *Clybourne Park*, and *Woody Guthrie's American Song*. A theatre arts graduate from Southern Oregon University, Chris has been involved with a number of professional companies including the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the 5th Avenue in Seattle, the Oregon Cabaret Theatre, ArtsWest, and The Shedd Institute. When not onstage, he spends his days promoting the arts as Theatre Assistant at Company of Fools. This year Chris accepted the role of a lifetime, proudly playing the part of "Dad" to his bouncing baby boy.



KAYLA KELLY

(Mary Bennet) is from Houston, Texas, and holds a Bachelors of Arts from SFASU. This is her first show with Company of Fools, and she is excited

to be working with the company. She has had the opportunity to be a part of *Peter/Wendy* as Wendy with Bag&Baggage, *The Killing Fields* as Iphigenia with Orphicplays, *Romeo and Juliet* as Benvolio with PAE, and Mme Dudley in the Original cast of *Scarlet* and *A Christmas Carol* as Fan/Elizabeth with Portland Playhouse. Kayla enjoys sketch comedy, and writing and finding creation in everyday life. *Special thanks to my Dad, Mom and Brandy Rood and everyone who has made this play possible.*



ALEXIS ULRICH

(Lydian Wickham) This is Alexis first show with Company of Fools and she is so excited to be performing for you tonight. She has been performing

onstage since she was five. Some of her favorite roles include Queen Elizabeth I in *Shakespeare in Love*, Deloris in *Sister Act*, and Elizabeth Proctor in *The Crucible*. She is currently pursuing her Bachelors Degree in Theatre at Idaho State University. *She would like to dedicate this performance to her mom who passed away earlier this year.*

IDAHO CONTENT STANDARDS

Reading Standards for Literature that apply to Company of Fools performance MISS BENNET: CHRISTMAS AT PEMBERLEY.

KEY IDEAS & DETAILS:

Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

8th grade Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

9th–10th grade: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CRAFT & STRUCTURE:

Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

8th grade: Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.

11th–12th grade: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

INTEGRATION OF KEY IDEAS:

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

9th–10th grade: Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible, or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

11th–12th grade: Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text.

Materials for this study guide were gathered from the following sources:

www.anglotopia.net/british-history/great-events-in-british-history-your-guide-to-the-regency-era-the-epitome-of-elegance-and-extravagance/

www.historytoday.com/archive/regency-period-begins

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jane_Austen

www.sde.idaho.gov/academic/shared/ela-literacy/booklets/ELA-Literacy-Standards.pdf

www.princeton.edu/news/2017/12/14/jane-austen-then-and-now