



TheatreWorks  
SILICON VALLEY

# SENSE AND SENSIBILITY



THE GUIDE BOOK





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

*The Drawing Room* ..... 4  
A Sense of Wealth and High Society

*The Billiard Room* ..... 6  
A Sense of the Relationships

*The Bedroom* ..... 12  
A Look at SENSE versus SENSIBILITY

*The Dressing Room* ..... 14  
The Clothing Sensibility

*The Study* ..... 16  
A Sensible Look at Jane Austen

*The Garden* ..... 18  
A Sensible Look at Feminism

*References* ..... *back page*

Content Creator, SINJIN JONES

Publisher, ALEJANDRA CISNEROS

Editor, KATIE DAI

Art Director, DEN LEGASPI

## About

### TheatreWorks Silicon Valley

Founded in 1970, TheatreWorks has grown from a truly original Silicon Valley start-up to become the peninsula's leading professional nonprofit theatre company.

Now in our 51st season, TheatreWorks presents a wide variety of contemporary plays and musicals, as well as revitalizing great works of the past. We are champions of new work, offering artists support and a creative home as they develop exciting new stories for the American theatre. Offstage, arts education programs in our schools and arts engagement programs in our neighborhoods uplift our audiences and strengthen community bonds.

Whether onstage or off, in everything that we do, TheatreWorks seeks to celebrate the human spirit and the wonderful diversity of our Silicon Valley community.

For more information, visit [theatreworks.org](http://theatreworks.org)

### How to use this guide? It's easy. It's link-friendly!

**TOC** Click on Table of Contents title & you'll go right to that page!

**●** **Gold text** links are active to external resources.

**≡** The arrow (middle bottom of page) will take you to the TOC.

# SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

11 THE GARDEN

THE STUDY  
12

4  
THE DRAWING ROOM

6  
THE BILLIARD ROOM

10  
THE DRESSING ROOM

8  
THE BEDROOM

# THE DRAWING ROOM

## *A Sense of Wealth and High Society*

Our story takes place during the Regency Era, which took place in Britain from 1811 to 1820.

Imagine you are a wealthy female aristocrat in the early 1800s. Instead of formally working, you are expected to maintain appearances and a life befitting of your status.



Charles Joseph Frédéric Soulacroix - *Afternoon Tea*, c. 1890

Here's what your average day would look like:

TIME OF DAY	THE SCHEDULE OF A WOMAN DURING THE REGENCY ERA
7:30am	You are awakened by a lady's maid. Tea is brought to you.
8:00am	Getting ready for the day. You usually wash up in your clothes instead of bathing regularly. You are dried, powdered, and dressed by your lady's maid. Special care is given to your hands: washing and soaking, trimming and filing, polishing the nails, followed by hand cream.
9:00am	Breakfast is served by the cooks as a formal meal with the family.
9:30am	Time for calisthenics! Dressed in white cotton, bloomers, and a sash, you exercise in this simple way. This was thought to ward off spiritual diseases. Or, you might go for a horse ride or a stroll.
10:00am	Attend to correspondence, instruct servants, plan for the day's affairs, and make future plans.
11:00am	Visit exhibits, museums, soirees, and attend to other outings and social expectations.
2:00pm	Lunch.
3:00pm	Formal calls, garden or tea party, charity bazaars, and informal calls.
5:00pm	Prepare yourself for the evening.
7:00pm	Host a dinner party at your home for either a small group of friends or a grand group.
10:00pm	Attend a ball or a dance somewhere outside of the home.



**How would repeating this schedule six days a week affect you?  
Are there ways that you would break the rules?**

*Party Planner:*

**If you had to plan a party for your high society peers of the 1800s, what would it look like?**

# FLASH FORWARD



How does your day compare to those of the Regency Era?

Use this template to make an activity schedule.

TIME	YOUR SCHEDULE



## THE OTHER SIDE

What we don't see in *Sense and Sensibility* is the other side of the Regency Era. The massive wealth gaps led to a significant amount of the population living in poverty. Many children worked in mines and factories to make ends meet for their families.



# THE BILLIARD ROOM

## *A Sense of the Relationships*

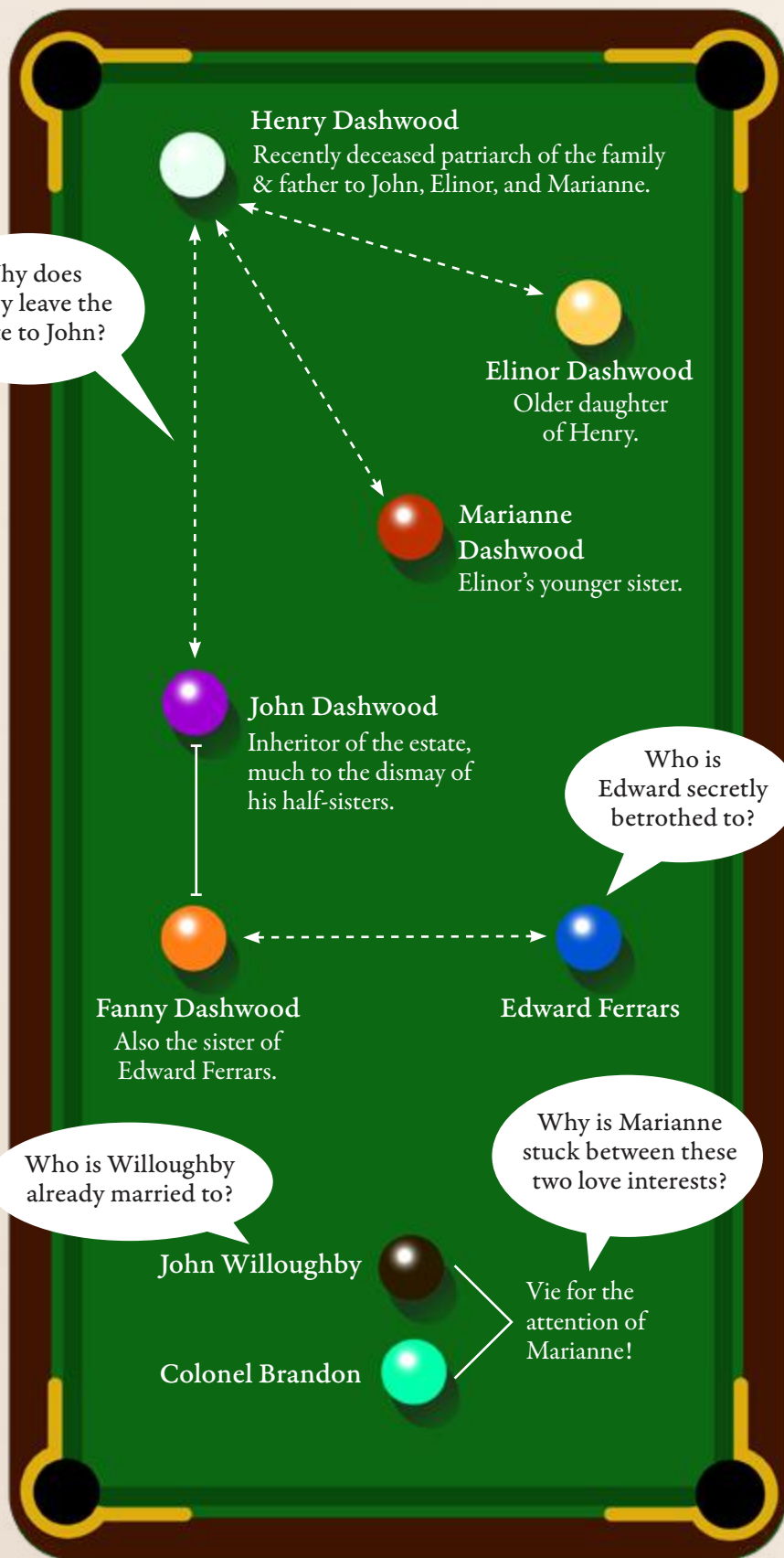
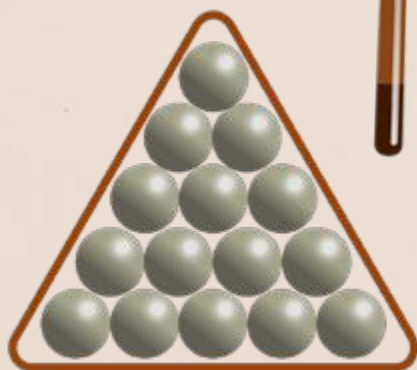
One of the things that makes *Sense and Sensibility* fun is the dizzying array of relationships to track. It's one of the things we love about British romances (think *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, or *Bridgerton*).

Use this chart to track how our characters are connected and see if you can fill in the gaps!



FAMILY

MARRIED







## Create your own romance!

Use the next two pages to create your own story.

- Start with siblings (like Elinor and Marianne) and work outward
- See what kinds of complex relationships you can weave
- Create a chart like **this one** to show all of the connections
- Write your very own British romance story!



Because of when it was written, the relationships in *Sense and Sensibility* follow traditional gender expectations. Can you create your own story in a way that takes advantage of today's expanding gender and relationship nuances?

FOR INSTANCE:

- Are there trans or nonbinary characters in your story?
- Do the male identifying characters do the pining?
- What are modern boundaries in place for relationships?





YOUR STORY

A large white rectangular area containing 20 horizontal dotted lines for writing.

YOUR CHART




# THE BEDROOM

## *A Look at Sense vs Sensibility*

*Sense and Sensibility* focuses on just what the title indicates: the difference between being guided by sense (using your head) or sensibility (following your emotions). It was generally believed that young women should focus on making sensible, advantageous matches, as the futures of their families also hung in the balance. A lot could be gained for the gentry classes in terms of financial security, political alliances, and future heirs if a daughter married well.

In our story, **ELINOR** is more reserved: she has a strong sense of responsibility for her family and friends, and she often puts their welfare over hers. Consequently, sometimes others see her as cold.

**MARIANNE**, on the other hand, is eagerly expressive of her feelings and emotions. She lets her love and her romance guide her through her love triangle, but soon grows to learn how selfish her sensibilities can be.

During the Regency Era and the later Victorian Era, there were many rules and expectations for relationships, marriage, and love.

**CLICK HERE**

to learn about love  
in the Regency Era.

**CLICK HERE**

to read about courtship  
rules in the Victorian Era.



Rules for dating and marriage are often cultural and familial in nature.

**What are rules do you and your family follow for dating and marriage?**

**How have these rules changed over time?**



# THE DRESSING ROOM

## *The Clothing Sensibility*

Fashion was a major part of upper-class life in the Regency Era. During the time of *Sense and Sensibility*, clothing and styles were often more relaxed and simple. Called the “age of undress,” women would often dress like statues coming to life. Greek fashion inspired the current fashion, and fillet-Greek classical hairstyles and high waisted clothing with a more triangular hem gained popularity. Pastel fabrics, natural makeup, bare arms, and blonde wigs accessorized with hats, turbans, gloves, jewelry, and small handbags were hallmarks of the era.

Based on what you see in *Sense and Sensibility*, try and determine which of the images below belong to the Regency Era (the era of the musical) and which belong to the Victorian Era (the more formal era that comes later).





Fashion elements from these eras can still be found today. Things like the empire waist, puffed short sleeves, and the spencer jacket still garner a lot of attention these days!



The Empire Waist is back in fashion. This dress costs \$665!



These spencer jackets sell for over \$1,000 from Dolce & Gabbana.



Puffed short sleeves were fashionable in both time periods.



**When looking back at the 2020s, what do you think historians will say about our fashion?**

Write a Wikipedia article about the fashions of the 2020s.



## THE STUDY

### *A Sensible Look at Jane Austen*

*Sense and Sensibility* was originally a novel written by Jane Austen but published anonymously. She wrote the original draft of the novel when she was just 19 years old, drawing inspiration from other novels of the 1790s, though it wasn't published until 1811. Her works were very popular in her time and more popular than ever now—she's even on the back of the 10 pound note in England!

Jane Austen wrote six novels which interpret, critique, and comment on the British upper class. Austen's plots often explore the dependence of women on marriage in the pursuit of favorable social standing and economic security. Her works have inspired hundreds of written adaptations and dozens of movie, television and theatrical adaptations.

Other incredible women writing during this time include sisters Charlotte and Emily Bronte (*Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*) who wrote under pseudonyms just like Jane Austen, and Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein*). These incredible writers paved the way for many of the prolific modern women writers we love: Toni Morrison, Beverly Cleary, and Margaret Atwood, just to name a few.





## *Two Truths and a Lie*

See if you can spot the untrue fact about Jane Austen from the list of three below.

1. All of Jane Austen's novels were published anonymously.
2. Jane Austen stopped writing for 10 years
3. Jane Austen lived to be 55 years old.



### ANSWERS:

1. **TRUE:** She lived in a time period when women were expected to be wives and mothers, and nothing else. So, it is understandable that she wanted to publish her works anonymously! Women were not welcome in the world of writing, a field dominated by men. It was considered improper if a woman tried her hand at writing, let alone publish her work.

2. **TRUE:** Austen had produced 3 of her novels by 1801. Then, in the few years before her father's death in 1805, it seems that Austen had stopped writing completely. It's hard to say why this happened, as most of Austen's letters and correspondences were destroyed by her sister Cassandra after Jane's death. It wasn't until 10 years later when her family had settled down to live in a home owned by her brother Edward that she picked up her pen again.

3. **FALSE:** Jane Austen died in 1817 at the age of 41 years old. She had been suffering from an illness that today is thought to have been Addison's disease, or perhaps Hodgkin's Lymphoma. She had begun feeling unwell in 1816, and by April 1817 she was bed ridden. She died in July.

Can you name 3 women  
writers who you admire?



**FLASH FORWARD**



# THE GARDEN

## *A Sensible Look at Feminism*



Edmund Blair Leighton - *Lady in a Garden*, 1906

The roles of women were clearly defined and very limiting during the Regency Era. Numerous journal entries along with novels like *Sense and Sensibility* point to a very sheltered world for women, who were seen to need strict schedules, and without any ability to work or explore interests in public.

The ideology of men and women occupying “separate spheres” was supported by the idea that there were “natural” characteristics of men and women that suited each for different roles. Women, considered physically weaker yet morally superior, were believed to be best suited for the domestic sphere.

After a woman married, her rights and property ceased to remain her own. Everything that she owned belonged to her husband, including her body, property, and money. Documents from this time show how depressed many women were.

Jane Austen depicts her female characters as thoughtful, clever, ambitious, and sometimes scheming women.



In what ways do the characters of *Sense and Sensibility* break from the gender roles assigned to them?

How do they take power back?



Take a look at the news stories:

- >> **The Pandemic and the Gender Pay Gap**
- >> **Gender Roles and Stereotypes**
- >> **Views on Gender Equality**



How do gender roles still hold back women in society?

In what ways have we progressed toward equality?

Where do we still need to grow?



# TheatreWorks

SILICON VALLEY

[www.theatreworks.org](http://www.theatreworks.org)



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