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Worlds Colliding: Austen & Bridgerton

Adapted from: https://strictlyjaneausten.com/worlds-colliding-austen-bridgerton/

READING

Would Jane Austen have recognized the world portrayed in Bridgerton? The smash Netflix series announces its allegiance to Austen in its opening moments, set in 1813—the very year Austen published *Pride and Prejudice*. This timing is no accident. All six of Austen's novels appeared during the Regency period (1811-1820), when the Prince of Wales became Prince Regent following King George III's descent into madness.

Austen's influence on Regency fiction is undeniable. William Makepeace Thackeray is clearly indebted to Austen in his great Victorian novel *Vanity Fair,* while Georgette Heyer founded the entire "Regency Romance" subgenre inspired by Austen's novels. Julia Quinn's *Bridgerton* series continues this literary tradition, raising the question: would Austen recognize this world?

Despite historical inaccuracies that would likely irk her, there is substantial overlap between Austen's novels and Bridgerton.

Bath: A Shared Setting

Both are drawn to Bath. In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland exclaims, "Oh! Who can ever be tired of Bath?" while in *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot reunites with Captain Wentworth in Bath after seven years apart, sharing one of Austen's most memorable walks toward the Royal Crescent. Netflix similarly embraces Bath's elegant architecture and cobblestone streets, using it prominently in seasons 1 and 2, and returning in 2023 to film season 3 scenes, including No. 1 Royal Crescent as the Featherington home.

Focus on the Elite

Both works concentrate on society's upper echelons rather than the broader population. Austen focuses on the landed gentry—families like the Elliots in *Persuasion*—while Bridgerton depicts the court and wealthy aristocrats. Together, royals, aristocracy, and gentry comprised a tiny fraction of society. In 1816, when England's population was roughly 11 million, Lord Byron claimed "the fashionable world" consisted of merely 1,500 people. This narrow focus allows both to create worlds of elegance insulated from the violence and injustices of Regency society.

War and Violence

Yet conflict does surface. Austen features the Napoleonic Wars most prominently in *Persuasion*, where Captain Wentworth gains wealth through "prize money," while in Bridgerton, Marina's lover fights in Spain. Both also incorporate duelling—a common Regency practice. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Colonel Brandon and John Willoughby duel over Marianne's honour offstage; in Bridgerton, Anthony and Simon's "Affair of Honour" over Daphne takes centre stage.

Reputation and the Marriage Market

Both reveal the enormous pressure on young women to protect their reputations. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mary Bennet warns that "loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable" and "one false step involves her in endless ruin." Austen's most treacherous libertine is Willoughby; Bridgerton's is Simon, whom Daphne calls "a rake through and through." Marianne lacks the wealth to satisfy Willoughby and is discarded; Daphne, wealthier, secures Simon—but only after executing a key plot of modern Regency Romance: reforming the rake.

Race and Social Justice

Most searchingly, both confront race. Austen addresses this in *Sanditon* by introducing Miss Lambe, a young "half mulatto" woman from the West Indies whose wealth attracts interest despite her race—a subtle critique of racism in Regency Britain. Bridgerton's casting of Golda Rosheuvel as Queen Charlotte is historically inaccurate, but its multiracial approach has sparked passionate discussions about racial stereotypes, colonialism, and Eurocentric narratives, much like Austen's introduction of Miss Lambe.

In these ways, Austen and Bridgerton speak across centuries, united by their exploration of elegance, ambition, duty, and the human heart.

1. Reading Comprehension - Answer the questions.

1. Why is the year **1813** important in the text?
2. Why is **Bath** important in both works?
3. Which social classes are mainly represented in the stories?
4. How do the stories portray the importance of reputation?
5. What social issues appear in both Austen's novels and *Bridgerton*?

VOCABULARY

2. Match the words to the correct definitions.

1. gentry ___	a) a man known for immoral romantic behaviour
2. libertine ___	b) a social class just below the aristocracy
3. elite ___	c) the opinion people have about someone
4. rake ___	e) people with great social status and wealth
5. reputation ___	f) virginity, especially of a woman
6. virtue ___	

3. Match the words to the correct definitions.

1. smash ____	a) rejected
2. indebted ____	b) successful
3. substantial ____	c) of considerable importance, size, or worth

4. landed ____ 5. insulated from ____ 6. irretrievable ____ 7. treacherous ____ 8. discarded ____	d) protected from harmful, unpleasant, or unwanted influences, experiences or consequences e) owing gratitude for a service or favour f) impossible to regain or recover h) guilty of or involving betrayal or deception i) owning much land, especially through inheritance

4. Complete the table with the correct form of the words.

NOUN	VERB	ADJECTIVE
	irk	
	depict	
	discard	
	secure	
	repute	

5. Word Formation - Complete the sentence with the correct form of the word in brackets.

1. Austen's novels are still extremely _____ today. (INFLUENCE)
2. Protecting one's social _____ was essential during the Regency era. (REPUTE)
3. The series presents a more _____ version of Regency society. (DIVERSITY)
4. The characters often face difficult moral _____ .(DECIDE)
5. Marriage was often linked to economic _____ .(SECURE)

6. Choose the correct word to complete each sentence.

1. The show portrays a world of elegance largely _____ from social problems. a) removed b) surrounded c) trapped	2. In Regency society, women were under great _____ to marry well. a) pressure b) control c) expectation
3. The casting choices in the series have _____ debate about race and history. a) created b) opened c) sparked	4. Austen's novels often offer a _____ critique of society. a) subtle b) loud c) visible

VIDEO - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrsfHgkWt5I

7. Watch the short video 'What 'Bridgerton' Gets Right About the Regency Era'. Decide whether the statements below are true or false.

1. The three main things a British debutante must do are: navigate the marriage market, speak up for yourself, and look glamorous. _____
2. The London season took place between winter and spring when Parliament was in session. _____
3. The Ton was the term for Regency high society. _____
4. Unmarried women were accompanied by a chaperone to protect them from scandal and ensure their safety. _____

8. Discussion Questions:

- Which aspects of the Regency era surprised you?
- How does the video help explain similarities between Austen and *Bridgerton*?
- Which elements are modernized for entertainment?

WRITING

Lady Whistledown

Lady Whistledown's gossip column drives most of the action in Bridgerton. It is true that magazines of the day ran series – in some cases, decades-long – that exposed the romances, adulteries, and scandals within high society.

A key difference, explains Dr Hannah Greig (historical advisor to the show), is that in the real scandal sheets and magazines of the day, the subjects of gossip would not have been named. "Their identities might have been very loosely disguised," she says. "Someone might have just printed their initials, like the Duke of H instead of the Duke of Hastings. But it was so obvious who they were talking about. It was a way to get around libel laws. There would have been no point in having these columns if we didn't know who they were talking about."

9. Imagine you are Lady Whistledown. Write a scandalous gossip passage (5–7 sentences) about a fictional character or couple. Include:

- Romance, intrigue, or social scandal
- Hints at identity without naming them explicitly
- Optional: humorous or witty tone

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Key:

1. Reading Comprehension - Answer the questions.

1. It is the year Pride and Prejudice was published and the year in which Bridgerton begins.
2. It appears prominently in both Austen's novels and Bridgerton as an important social centre during the Regency period.
3. The landed gentry, aristocracy, royal court and wealthy elite.
4. Reputation is essential, especially for women. A damaged reputation could ruin marriage prospects and social standing.
5. Class, marriage, reputation, gender expectations, war, race, social inequality.

2. Match the words to the correct definitions.

1. B, 2. A, 3. E, 4. A, 5. C, 6. F

3. Match the words to the correct definitions.

1. B, 2. E, 3. C, 4. I, 5. D, 6. F, 7. H, 8. A

4. Complete the table with the correct form of the words.

NOUN	VERB	ADJECTIVE
irritation	irk	irritating / irksome
depiction	depict	depicted
discard / discarding	discard	discarded
security	secure	secure
reputation / repute	repute	reputable

5. Word Formation - Complete the sentence with the correct form of the word in brackets.

1. influential
2. reputation
3. diverse
4. decisions
5. security

6. Choose the correct word to complete each sentence.

1.B, 2. A, 3. C, 4. A

7. Watch the short video 'What 'Bridgerton' Gets Right About the Regency Era'. Decide whether the statements below are true or false.

1. F, 2. T, 3. T, 4. T