

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

PERSUASION

by Jane Austen

- First, talk about Sir Elliot. What matters most in his view of life? What does his reaction to Lady Russell's proposals suggest about the kind of man he is?
- What do we come to learn (and when do we learn it) about Sir Walter's three daughters—Elizabeth, Anne, and Mary? Describe them. How does Sir Walter treat each of them, especially the two eldest, Elizabeth and Anne?
- How would you describe Lady Russell? Does her—or did her—influence over Anne work toward Anne's betterment or detriment?
- When younger, was Anne right to have followed Lady Russell's advice? Did it show passivity on Anne's part or good judgment to have allowed herself to be guided by her elders? Contrast her with Louisa Croft's assertion later in the book that she would never be dissuaded from following her own desires.
- Talk about the Musgrove family and their affection for and interactions with one another. How do they feel about Mary Elliot Musgrove as their daughter- and sister-in-law? How do they receive Anne? What do you make of Anne's first visit when all complain to her, behind the others' backs, about how the two boys are raised?
- Do you find Mary's hypochondria funny...or irritating...or what? Consider, also, the scene where Mary manipulates Anne into looking after young Charles so that she, Mary, can go dinner at the Musgrove's and meet Captain Wentworth!
- Describe the kind of marriage that Admiral and Mrs. Croft seem to have. How do they view one another? How does their marriage differ from, say, Charles and Mary Musgrove's? Is the Croft's relationship typical of that era, do you suppose?
- With their newfound wealth, both Captain Wentworth and Admiral Croft are able to join the upper ranks of English society. How have sailors such as Captain Wentworth and Admiral Croft made their fortunes? What is Austen's opinion of this? What is yours? What other options are available for social mobility in the early 19th century?



Skokie Public Library

5215 Oakton Street
Skokie, Illinois 60077
847.673.7774 / 847.673.7797 fax
www.skokielibrary.info

Skokie Public Library Trustees: John Graham, President;
Diana Hunter, Vice President/President Emerita; Zelda Rich, Secretary;
Susan Greer; Eva Weiner; John M. Wozniak; Dayle Zelenka

Director: Carolyn A. Anthony

- What kind of person is Captain Wentworth? What kind of woman does he say he admires? What is the impact on him when he learns that Anne turned down Charles Musgrove in marriage?
- Why does Mary disparage Charles Hayter? What is his economic and social standing with respect to her own?
- When Anne meets Captain Benwick in Lyme, what drew the two together? Were you expecting a romance to develop between the two? Why...or why not?
- How does Wentworth react to Louisa's fall? Whom does he blame—himself or Louisa? What does he begin to realize about Anne...and Louisa?
- When Anne first reaches Bath, at first she believes Mr. Elliot is interested in her sister, Elizabeth. Yet Anne hopes that he might not be "too nice, or too observant, if Elizabeth were his object." What does she mean?
- When it becomes apparent that Mr. Elliot has turned his attentions toward Anne, what makes her uncertain of his sincerity? In the end, what does Anne learn about Elliot's motivations?
- In all of her novels, Austen casts a gentle, satirical eye on English society. In *Persuasion*, her gaze seems more critical: what might she be saying in this work about rank and property—and about the possible rise of a middle class?