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Romantik och rationalitet i Jane Austens Sense and Sensibility

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Sammanfattning


Denna uppsats argumentation bygger på ett antagande att Austen förespråkar en balans mellan pengar och passion i val av make/maka. Genom att jämföra tre kvinnliga karaktärer och deras inställning till äktenskapet, såväl som konsekvenserna av deras värderingar och val visas att en balans av materiellt och emotionellt välstånd är att föredra. Slutligen föreslås hur *Sense and Sensibility* kan ses ur ett didaktiskt perspektiv. Detta avsnitt behandlar såväl litteraturundervisning i allmänhet som en praktisk plan över hur man som lärare kan använda sig av just detta verk i engelskundervisningen.

Jane Austen, one of the most widely-read authors of the 19th century, and her at the same time thorough and humorous portraits of English society have gained massive popularity in recent years. Especially her lively depiction of life in the English countryside in the early 1800s, accompanied by an explicit satirical note, makes her novels suitable and interesting objects of literature studies. Even though her stories are deeply rooted in their own time and society, they never seem to go out of fashion. This can be explained by the fact that in many ways people today are dealing with similar problems and critical choices. 200 years later, we still need to take issues such as love, money, and status into consideration when making life-determining decisions. One of Austen’s most famous novels, *Sense and Sensibility*, was published in 1811 and deals with the problematic sides of this topic. The fact that we are facing similar predicaments today makes it a worthwhile novel for classroom work, as well.

This essay is based on the argument that Austen promotes a balance between money and passion when it comes to choosing a spouse. A comparison between three female characters and their approach to marriage, as well as the consequences of their values and choices shows that a balance of material and emotional wealth is preferable. Finally, the essay makes didactical suggestions as to how the novel can be used in a classroom setting. This section consists of two parts: firstly, teaching of literature in general and secondly, a practical plan on how to use this particular novel when teaching English as a foreign language.

Nyckelord
Jane Austen, romantik, pengar, äktenskap, litteraturundervisning
Romance and Rationality:
A Study of Love, Money and Marriage in Jane Austen’s Sense and Sensibility

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Contents

Introduction..................................................................................................................3

Chapter 1: The Mercenary Lucy Steele........................................................................6

Chapter 2: The Passionate Marianne Dashwood.........................................................13

Chapter 3: The Balanced Elinor Dashwood.................................................................22

Chapter 4: Sense and Sensibility in the Classroom...................................................30

Conclusion..................................................................................................................36

Works Cited................................................................................................................38
Introduction

Jane Austen is regarded as one of the great English novelists of the nineteenth century. This is thanks to her humorous and witty description of the country gentry life she was part of, but also due to her felicitous criticism of it. *Sense and Sensibility*, which was published in 1811, is one of her most famous novels. The vivid depiction of society around 1800 combined with her satirical undertone and sharp eye for human character makes Austen an interesting object of literary analysis. From a didactic point of view, her works provide us with both cultural and historical insights into life in Britain. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, her fiction never seems to age. Even though she is firmly rooted in her own society, she observes and presents it in a way that modern readers are able to comprehend and enjoy. The same goes for the themes of her novels, which are of never-ending topicality. Two hundred years later, we still are much more similar than we perhaps would like to admit. Although our society and way of life have changed, issues such as love, money, and status still influence our lives and determine the decisions we make. Hence, Austen bridges both the temporal and the spatial distance and we are able to relate to her characters and the trials they face. This makes Austen a well-suited starting point for teaching in the foreign-language classroom.

The title *Sense and Sensibility* indicates the human tendency to value different things in life. It is also strongly related to two universally acknowledged features of society, namely money and love. To many of Jane Austen’s characters, material considerations are more important than emotional ones. The characters in *Sense and Sensibility* are no exception. In spite of this, the money question is hardly ever addressed or openly discussed in the novel, indicating the delicacy of the subject. Nonetheless, everyone seems to be acutely aware of the economic status of everybody else and the omniscient narrator introduces the whole collection of characters by declaring their financial assets. Lack of money is a misfortune, and even
more so for women who are often dependent on a father, a husband, or a brother for a comfortable life. Consequently, money constitutes an important foundation for marriage – particularly for women, but does money really need to dictate our lives? Could not love be a sufficient and legitimate reason for a marital alliance? Or does passion mean risk-taking and transient happiness? In the end, what is required for true happiness and the preservation of it?

This essay sets out to study what aspects should be considered when choosing a spouse. The argument is that Austen encourages a balance between love and money, which is shown through the female characters and their choice of husband. As it happens, Lucy Steele, Marianne Dashwood and Elinor Dashwood all represent different positions on marriage and serve as a basis for contrasting money and love with the combination of both. By examining the consequences of their choices and actions, we will arrive at a conclusion on what Austen is trying to advocate on the subject, and concurrently prove the universality and didactic potential of the argument.

Each girl has a chapter dedicated to her, which firstly deals with her background and situation in life. This explains her position on the marriage market which strongly influences what qualities she seeks in a husband. Secondly, her manners are examined and compared to what we see of her real personality. This reveals just how much sense and how much sensibility she possesses and how this determines the way she navigates the road towards marriage. Thirdly, her motives for marriage are analysed, as well as the ensuing social and personal consequences of her choice. Here it will be clear if love or money matters the most to her. We will also see what successes and sacrifices her decision brings. The crucial question, finally, is whether Austen rewards her with true happiness in the end. Presumably, the answer to this question sums up Austen’s judgement and message to the reader. Adding a further dimension to the essay, the fourth chapter will focus on the teaching of literature. We
will delve into how the questions and findings of this essay can be used in the educational context of the foreign-language classroom.

As one of the most widely-read writers in Britain, Austen has been a favourite author of many critics. However, this is not to say that the reception of her works at all times has been overwhelmingly positive. On its publication, Sense and Sensibility was accused of being “narrow in scope” (Critical Review Feb 1812 in Simons 83) and was seen as a sort of moral conduct book for society, although it was exactly this moral conduct Austen set out to criticise. In modern times, many critics apply a feminist perspective. This means that they acknowledge that the novel illuminates many of the problems faced by women in a society ruled by men. Finding a husband and provider was of course one of the biggest and most essential concerns. For the purpose of this essay, Judy Simons’s guide Sense and Sensibility by Jane Austen has proven very useful as it deals with both the general message and the fine details of the novel. However, most critical works are content with contrasting Marianne and Elinor and their different composition of sense and sensibility. The distinguishing feature of this essay is that it brings the supporting character Lucy Steele into this comparison, thus illustrating three different roads to marriage: money, passion, and the road in between. An additional contribution of the essay lies in the suggested use of the findings as teaching material.
Chapter 1: The Mercenary Lucy Steele

First of all, this chapter will introduce the background of the character Lucy Steele. It will deal with her family and fortune, as well as her prospects. Secondly, the character will be examined as regards superficial personality traits such as looks and manners along with the effects of her behavior towards other people. Thirdly, Lucy’s real character will be examined by looking closely at the reasons behind her actions. Here her less flattering qualities will be exposed, as well as her lack of moral values. Finally, we will delve into Lucy’s incentives for marrying and try to find the values that govern her choice. The consequences of her choice in marriage will be analysed with the concluding question: does she find happiness in the end?

At first glance, Lucy Steele and her involvement in the story seem to be highly accidental. She and her sister Anne happen to run into their distant relative Mrs. Jennings, and are thus invited to stay at Barton Park. However, as the plot develops, it becomes clear that she will have a major effect on the lives of the main characters.

Regarding her situation in life, Lucy is presumably an orphan. She has grown up with her uncle in Plymouth, who is a private tutor and has limited financial means at his disposal. No other members of the Steele family are mentioned, and Lucy and her sister seem to spend their time in prolonged visits to various acquaintances. The financial background is equally unclear, but there is no reason to doubt Lucy’s own statement that she “shall have no fortune” (126). Elinor considers Lucy “inferior in connections and probably inferior in fortune to herself,” (134) which is a noteworthy fact as Elinor herself is only entitled to modest economic means. As Edward Copeland points out, “In Sense and Sensibility the single most significant economic problem for women is the lack of fortune” (132). Mona Scheuermann agrees that not having money “makes playing the marriage game so much more difficult” (319). In other words, having no income means being in the hands of others. Thus her desire of finding a husband with financial security motivates Lucy’s behaviour throughout the novel.
So what are Lucy’s means and strategies for pursuing this goal? Appearances matter; that is a well-established fact, especially since looks very well may compensate for lack of money. Lucy is introduced as a fashionable and ladylike woman. She certainly manages to present herself as attractive, hence the Middletons declare her to be “the most beautiful, elegant, accomplished and agreeable girl they had ever beheld” (120). Even though Elinor and Marianne do not take a liking to Lucy, they still find her good-looking and her dress smart enough.

Right from the start, Lucy’s civil manners are stressed. To mention a few, the Middletons are very fond of her and her ways. The Dashwood girls also acknowledge Lucy’s good manners, but without being as overwhelmed as other people. This is because they realise that flattery is a great skill of Lucy’s. She proves to be very ingratiating and is seemingly captivated by the charm of other people: “such of their [the Steele sisters] time as could be spared…was spent in admiration of whatever her ladyship was doing” (116).

Lucy also claims to be extremely fond of the Middleton children. Shortly after her arrival, she says that she “quite dotes upon them already” and she allows them to harass her (118). When one of the little boys is pinching her fingers, his misconduct only seems to amuse Lucy. Obviously she knows that a woman’s children are the safest way to her approval: “Lucy…was hardly less anxious to please one parent than the other [Lady Middleton and Fanny Dashwood]…” (220). Moreover, Lucy shows excessive humility and gratitude for any attention. She defends the indulgent upbringing of the Middleton children since it is “so natural in Lady Middleton” (118). Her gratitude is clearly displayed when she is invited to the John Dashwoods: “such an opportunity of being with Edward and his family was, above all things, the most material to her interest, and such an invitation the most gratifying to her feelings” (238). By invariably showing her gratitude, Lucy becomes a well-liked and popular person.
Hence, Lucy’s skilful treatment of her social superiors gives her many advantages. One of them is the invitation to stay with the Middletons at Barton Park and later on with the Dashwoods in London. Another is to be preferred to Elinor and Marianne by certain influential people. The two latter are less liked by Lady Middleton since they “neither flattered her nor the children” (231). Also Mrs. Ferrars pays Lucy attention because “she is not Elinor,” which confirms how she successfully makes people like her (224). As Gene W. Rouff puts it, “Lucy’s strategy in dealing with the hegemony of family, from which she is excluded, is to adopt its principles and insinuate herself into it” (74).

Unlike Lady Middleton, Fanny Dashwood and Mrs. Ferrars, Elinor has strong doubts about Lucy’s sincerity. She suspects that Lucy conceals her true character and after their first meeting she is “not blinded by the beauty or the shrewd look of the youngest [Lucy]” (119). However, after Lucy’s revelation of her engagement to Edward, Elinor addresses Lucy once more on the subject in order to probe the sincerity of the relationship. Lucy’s desperate emphasis on her and Edward’s mutual love convinces Elinor that “Edward was not only without affection for the person who was to be his wife; but he had not even the chance of being tolerably happy in marriage, which sincere affection on her side would have given” (145). This event clearly convinces Elinor of the insincerity of Lucy.

Even if her flattery sometimes seems effusive and naïve, Lucy certainly is a clever and manipulative person. Part of this is her strategy to guard her own interests while taking the role of the victim. When she realises that Elinor and Edward are seen as lovers, she decides to confide in Elinor in order to stress her own claim on him. While explaining the secrecy of the engagement, Lucy puts the blame on Edward’s ardour: “I was very unwilling to enter into it… but I was too young and loved him too well” (125). Of course, Lucy makes it impossible for Elinor to slight her as she appeals to Elinor’s honour and Edward’s good opinion of her.
Although she tries, Lucy cannot hide her lack of education. Elinor, who realises Lucy’s cleverness, considers this a great flaw and “pities her for the neglect of abilities which education might have rendered so respectable” (122). This becomes an added obstacle for any real friendship between them as “Elinor could have no lasting satisfaction in the company of a person who joined insincerity and ignorance, whose want of instruction prevented their meeting in conversation on terms of equality” (122).

Furthermore, Elinor soon detects Lucy’s lack of kindness. Certainly the revelation of the secret engagement serves the purpose of establishing Lucy’s right to marry Edward: “what other reason for the disclosure of the affair could there be, but that Elinor might be informed by it of Lucy’s superior claims on Edward?” (136). However, it also becomes clear that Lucy takes pleasure in ruining Elinor’s hopes of happiness. Lucy does not let her cruelty rest as she “hopes to be carrying the pain farther by persuading her [Elinor] that he [Edward] was kept away by the extreme affection for herself” (218). Simons stresses Lucy’s meanness: “Lucy’s announcement is deliberately calculated to hurt Elinor” (24). Lucy repeatedly seeks Elinor’s advice and consolation. Apparently, this is Lucy’s consistent strategy of estranging Elinor from Edward, that is through “the tension of unsought and painful confidences in conversations carried on under the cover of civil language” (Rouff 106). Interestingly enough, it is Lucy’s exaggerated and pretended kindness that enables us to “diagnose Lucy’s sly and unscrupulous exploitation of intimacy” (Ian Watt 42).

However, the full extent of her meanness only becomes clear at the end of the novel. Lucy deliberately causes a false report to be delivered to Elinor about which of the Ferrars brothers she has married, thus causing much unnecessary suffering. Austen uses this to illustrate Lucy’s treacherous side: “That Lucy intended to deceive…was perfectly clear to Elinor” (341). This episode reveals to Edward the true nature of his former fiancée and he realises that she is “capable of the utmost meanness of wanton ill-nature” (341).
In addition, Lucy lacks certain moral virtues. She is insensitive to other people’s emotions. Even at an early stage we wonder at the unwanted trust she imposes on Elinor and so, of course, does Elinor who says that “your secret is safe with me; but pardon me if I express some surprise at so unnecessary a communication” (127). She is determined to inflict suffering on those standing in her way, but for the most part it is her self-interest which motivates her actions. The narrator ironically sums up Lucy’s career: “Lucy’s behaviour in the affair…may be held forth as a most encouraging instance of what an earnest, an unceasing attention to self-interest…will do in securing every advantage of fortune” (349). Lucy’s selfishness surfaces again in her lack of a sense of duty. Unlike Edward, who despite his faded affection for her loyally keeps his part of the engagement, Lucy readily dismisses him as soon as she finds a better alternative. As she tells him, “I have thought myself at liberty to bestow my own [affections] on another, and I have no doubt of being as happy with him as I once used to think I might be with you” (339).

Returning to her choice of husband, Lucy’s circumstances are such that she is in need of a husband with substantial financial means. Therefore, she singles out Edward, or rather his impending inheritance. He happens to be the eldest son of a very rich family. Since money was of crucial importance in Austen’s day Vivien Jones may have Lucy in mind when she refers to some female characters as “more interested in money than in more important considerations when it comes to choosing husbands” (Jones 35). Clearly, what Lucy values the most in is the “economic contract” that matrimony constitutes (49).

Moreover, a husband of good family is of importance to Lucy. Edward is a gentleman and the Ferrars family is a respectable and desirable alliance. Elinor, too, acknowledges the value of social standing and believes that their “connection is certainly a respectable one…and would gain her consideration among friends” (342). Of course, the prospect of marrying into such a family is attractive to Lucy. Furthermore, Edward’s prospects in life appeal to Lucy.
Many options are at his disposal: “his mother wished to interest him in political concerns, to get into parliament, or to see him connected with some of the great men of the day” (17). However, since his financial future depends on his mother, Lucy is eager to ensure her goodwill. She fears that if their engagement was known, “Mrs. Ferrars…would very likely secure everything to Robert…and the idea of that frightens away my inclination for hasty measures” (142). Unfortunately for Lucy, her sister does not treat the delicate situation with the discretion required, which eventually leads to the final revelation of the engagement.

This revelation also has consequences for Lucy’s respectability within the social circle. Prior to this her social inferiority was compensated by her flattery, but with this cover blown away, there is no end to the disappointment and anger directed towards her. Fanny will “never think well of anybody again…after being so deceived” and Mrs. Ferrars demonstrates her disapproval by disinheriting Edward (248).

Even when Edward is disinherited, Lucy has nothing to lose by keeping to their engagement. After all, marrying is better than being single and a poor man is better than no man at all. However, she only stays loyal to him until someone better comes along; in this case Robert Ferrars, proving that the first engagement “fettered neither her inclinations nor her actions” (342). He is now the sole heir as Mrs. Ferrars decides to omit Edward from her will. Robert is of the same good family as Edward, but is much more focus on pursuing a successful career and is now in possession of all the money. Furthermore, he is said to be the favourite son, which reduces the risk of being permanently rejected by Mrs. Ferrars.

Nevertheless, Lucy manages to avoid long-term sanction of her treacheries as her “respectful humility…and endless flatteries reconciled Mrs. Ferrars to Robert’s choice” of wife (349). Thus instead of being slighted forever, Lucy eventually becomes a favourite daughter “as necessary to Mrs. Ferrars as Robert or Fanny” (350). Hence she once again demonstrates what successful a survival strategy she has found in being guided by her self-
interest, and the whole episode stresses the power of those controlling the family fortune. In line with this, Ruoff argues that Austen “provides the material for a structural critique of the system of inheritance” (44). In the end, it is the Ferrars family fortune that decides the future of Edward, Elinor, Lucy and Robert. Lucy’s mercenary attitude towards love is confirmed by her rapid change of affections. Rouff sums up her strategy: “when Robert becomes the eldest son, Edward’s opportunistic fiancée Lucy quickly and smoothly shifts her attention to him and entraps him in the course of a few interviews” (50).

In terms of personal consequences, Lucy finds herself married to a man much like her. They are both superficial and have a limited emotional life. He is the dandy he is described to be and readily shows this by the “happy self-complacency of his manners” (279). Like Lucy, Robert is a self-centered man convinced of his own superiority, especially to his brother: “he was proud of his conquest [Lucy], proud of tricking Edward, and very proud of marrying privately without his mother’s consent” (350). Hence, it turns out that Lucy and Robert have more than one feature in common, for instance inconsideration of others.

So even though the question of money is her main concern, Lucy does not seem to end up unhappy. As the narrator tells us, she manages in “securing every advantage of fortune with no other sacrifice than that of time and conscience,” neither of which seems to have bothered her (350). The reason for this is the shallowness of her character; she is content with living a comfortable life and uses her social skills to maximize her happiness, above all the financial side of it. In order to contrast Lucy’s conduct, it is now time to move on to the other extreme position of marriage, namely to the one of the romantic Marianne Dashwood.
Chapter 2: The Passionate Marianne Dashwood

Following mainly the same pattern as the preceding one, this chapter will examine the character of the young Marianne Dashwood and her position on marriage. We will discover that she comes from a more privileged background, and moreover represents a completely different set of values and ideals in life than Lucy. The chapter will contrast their attitudes towards love and how they cope with its complications. We will see that an excessive focus on passion can be an emotionally devastating approach and that time can teach us to appreciate other qualities in a future spouse.

First of all, Marianne is part of a family enjoying the “general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintance” (5). She is the second Dashwood daughter of three, and part of an extensive network of uncles, cousins and in-laws. When the novel begins, her father has recently died. Since their half-brother inherits the main body of the father’s fortune, the Dashwood women are left with only a modest amount of money. Copeland argues that this is typically what happened to the “pseudo-gentry,” which refers to families which lose their income when the father dies (132). Even if their financial situation is seen as pitiable within their social circle, they are certainly not poor. Nevertheless, their economic status provides Marianne with only modest prospects in life. Her future comfort and security depend on a husband, but there is a risk that her limited assets may not be enough to attract a desirable one. In fact, women of this society are “‘objects’ in so far as the marriage market goes which seems likely to determine their material and social survival” (Christopher Gillie 97).

Moving on to appearance, Marianne is a handsome young woman of only sixteen. She is described as having “a striking form; and her face was so lovely; her skin was very brown, but her complexion uncommonly brilliant; her features were all good; her smile was sweet and attractive and in her dark eyes there was a spirit which could hardly be seen without delight” (48). However, as the story develops, the trials she has to go through alter her looks and her
brother later considers Marianne a “young woman who has been a beauty”, which is lamentable indeed, but still not a view shared by everyone (223).

Generally speaking, Marianne is well-mannered. Nevertheless, she sometimes lacks the politeness which society requires. She does not believe in keeping up appearances just for the sake of it. Occasionally, Marianne “refuses to enter into polite conversation because she finds conformity to false patterns of behaviour dishonest” (Simons 50). She withdraws from social life and family activities in order to cultivate her misery, which is seen as impolite in a society where the gentry is mainly occupied with social activities. Hence, she is one of the few who do not alter themselves to fit into the societal mould.

Marianne’s occasional lack of politeness is related to her honesty and sincerity. In contrast to Lucy, she never pretends, thus her conduct and utterances truly reflect her opinions and feelings. People around her are aware of this and she has some difficulties behaving civilly to people she dislikes. In line with this, she would rather say nothing at all than give an insincere response: “Marianne was silent; it was impossible for her to say what she did not feel, however trivial the occasion” (118). Tony Tanner claims that Marianne “demands that outward forms exactly project or portray inward feelings; this is a demand for sincerity and loathing of hypocrisy”, which is in direct opposition to the insincere Lucy’s position (364). Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar give further support to this by arguing that “Marianne is extremely…impatient with the polite lies of civility” (156).

In further contrast to Lucy, Marianne despises social codes or rather having to adjust to them. Her passionate approach to life prevents her from seeing the consequences of her actions. When Willoughby takes her to visit his aunt’s home Allenham, she does not realise – or perhaps rather chooses to ignore – the expectations their behaviour creates in their circle, namely that they are engaged to be married. Marianne explains her behaviour through her feelings and trusts her instincts, telling Elinor that “had there been any real impropriety in
what I did, I should have been sensible of it” (69). All the same, she paves her road to social and personal disaster by ignoring social codes and conventions.

To Marianne feelings are the true basis of human life. Early on the narrator tells us that “her sorrows, her joys could have no moderation” and that she “voluntarily renews, seeks and creates” overwhelming emotions, which shows that powerful feelings are what bring meaning and enjoyment to her life (8). She commits herself whole-heartedly to her emotions and readily puts these feelings on display. For instance, when she meets Edward “her pleasure in seeing him was like every other of her feelings, strong in itself and strongly spoken” (227). However, Ruoff argues that it is not Marianne’s emotions that are “exceedingly strong, but the fact that she cannot restrain them in the least” (25).

Equally important is that Marianne rejects presenting herself in society as better or stronger than she actually is. Unlike many others, who conceal their real sorrow and grief, Marianne does not mind being thought feeble or weak. She attracts the attention of everyone by bursting into tears at a dinner party in London, and dismisses Elinor’s plea for discretion by stating that “I care not who knows that I am wretched. The triumph of seeing me so may be open to the world” (179). By this openness in dealing with her misery, Marianne stands out in a circle where “secrecy is often a painful obligation imposed by a rigid society” (Tanner 360). This means that private concerns ideally should be concealed and not displayed in public or imposed on other people.

Impulsiveness in reactions and judgements also characterizes Marianne. She does not always consider the possible outcome of her utterances and actions. After the first conversation with Willoughby, Elinor observes Marianne’s premature intimacy and advises her playfully – but with a serious undertone - to restrain herself. Marianne responds with some pride by admitting that she had been “open and sincere where I ought to have been reserved, spiritless, dull, and deceitful…had I talked only of the weather and only once in ten
minutes, this reproach would have been spared” (49). Marianne’s impulsiveness also generates superficial judgements. She is not fully content with Edward since he “has none of that grace” she had wished for in Elinor’s husband (19). Colonel Brandon is dismissed since he is too old and on one occasion “complains of a slight rheumatic feel in one of his shoulders” (40). Her opinions are settled at an early stage and are as strong as her feelings for people, whether warm or cold.

Just as Lucy, Marianne is a self-centred person, but not in the same way. She has never had “much toleration for difference in taste from herself”, but she is very concerned about the people dear to her (122). Nevertheless, she does not fully recognise their grief if they do not show it, as she “thinks that the proof of feeling lies in its demonstrable effects”, i.e. unspoken feelings do not exist (Simons 43). Thus she mainly devotes her time to her own feelings and emotional distress. This consistent focus makes Marianne somewhat naïve and she cannot take in the sorrow of Elinor, Brandon and other people unless enlightened by someone else.

Ros Ballaster argues, however, that “worship of self is not at its most dangerous or destructive in Marianne…but in characters like Lucy Steele, who have no feeling at all”, especially since Marianne is willing to learn and prepared to change (xxii). Marianne’s self-awareness is “attractive to the reader, but always shown to be a sign of immaturity” (Gilbert & Gubar 157). This naivety distinguishes Marianne from Lucy. Despite her self-centeredness, Marianne is a very loyal person, especially to her sister. When the ladies in their social circle laud the artistic skills of the absent Miss Morton while Elinor’s are ignored, Marianne is gravely provoked and inclined to defend her sister, thus simply cannot remain silent. This is another proof of her devotion to the people she loves and her willingness to fight for them.

In spite of her sensibility and strong emotions, there is in fact some sense to Marianne. She is capable of learning by listening to reason and readily admits her own mistakes. She does realise that she lets her feelings control her. “Perhaps it was rather ill-judged in me to go to
Allenham…but it is a charming house, I assure you” (69). This shows that she is aware of what is appropriate and what is not, but even though she is willing to learn, she lets her feelings be the predominant force of decision.

As the story develops and she reconsiders her attitudes to life, Marianne changes into a more mature young woman. According to Simons, “the more serious and thoughtful side to Marianne’s nature takes over from her initial uncurbed enthusiasm” (39). This is made clear when Elinor explains the circumstances around Lucy’s and Edward’s secret engagement. Marianne reacts – as one would expect – very emotionally and is remorseful for having required so much of Elinor’s attention in the midst of her own distress: “how barbarous I have been to you! – you, who have borne with me in all my misery, who have seemed to be only suffering for me!” (247). Particularly through Elinor’s fate she learns that strong feelings do not necessarily need to be put on public display and later realises that there are family and social obligations to consider when handling personal emotions. Jones brings up this development and argues that Austen emphasizes “the importance of going beyond appearances to the reality beneath” in all her work (48).

So what are Marianne’s ideals for marriage and choice of husband? Her dreams are linked to her “romantic imagination” (Gilbert & Gubar 156), and she seeks a kindred spirit whose “eagerness in [his pursuits] should know no moderation” (46). She does not only wish for a provider, but a man fond of art and literature since she thinks that a husband must have all the virtues “and his person and manners must ornament his goodness with every possible charm” (20). She has very high standards for a spouse, particularly since her “opinions are based on the books she reads, not on any experience of life” (Simons 13). Nevertheless she is aware that she might not find what she seeks: “I am convinced that I shall never see a man whom I can really love. I require so much!” (20). Once more, her romantic hopes and unrealistic expectations distinguish her from Lucy’s rational position.
Unlike Lucy, love is the single most important matter to Marianne. Without love, there “would be no marriage at all…to me it would seem only a commercial exchange” (40). She confirms her contempt for money as she states that “money can only give happiness where there is nothing else to give it” (90). Moreover, she cherishes the conviction that true love only occurs once in life. Consequently, Rouff argues that her opinion is that “one can genuinely love but once, and second attachments can only be arrangements for economic security and social convenience” (60). Nevertheless, she acknowledges that money is necessary to provide comfort and security. Marianne wishes for roughly two thousand a year, which unsurprisingly corresponds exactly to Willoughby’s income. This face indicates that she adjusts her financial preferences to her love interest’s assets.

In fact, her relationship with Willoughby initially seems to be her fantasies come true. In him she finds a passionate man with dashing looks who appreciates art and literature as much as she does. Everyone considers them a pretty couple and it is obvious how much in love and how well-suited they are: “he was exactly formed to engage Marianne’s heart, for he joined not only a captivating person, but a natural ardour of mind” (50). Their mutual affection is openly shown on every occasion; at dances “they were partners for half the time, and when obliged to separate, were careful to stand together and scarcely spoke a word to anybody else” (55). However, following one’s heart solely in the choice for marriage might have social consequences. Marianne’s and Willoughby’s behaviour is regarded as inappropriate, especially since they never actually get engaged. The more thoughtful Elinor tells her that “even if they [Willoughby’s house and grounds] were one day to be your own, you would not be justified in what you have done” (69). This improper behaviour naturally is the cause of much gossip and results in widespread expectations in society. Mrs. Jennings confirms that their engagement “has been known all over town ever so long” (173).
Marianne’s attachment to Willoughby is thus based on her love principles, but it turns out to be an insufficient basis for her choice of husband. First and foremost, this approach ignores the practical issue of money, which Marianne’s financial situation does not really allow her to do. Willoughby is a spendthrift and Elinor later suggests to Marianne that “had you married, you must have been always poor” (326), which contradicts Scheuermann’s argument that “matrimony is the end, not the beginning of a woman’s financial trouble” (312). Additionally, it does not take social rules into consideration. We have seen that Marianne’s and Willoughby’s behaviour deviates from the social norm, which results in false rumours that they are engaged. From the beginning, Elinor tries to spare Marianne this social stigma by asking her to restrict her intimacy with Willoughby. This – of course – does not occur, which results in serious personal distress for Marianne.

The worst personal damage is caused by Marianne’s lack of inner and outer caution. Her intense love and unfailing trust in Willoughby persists through his abrupt departure and unexplained neglect, and only ends with his cruel letter of rejection. Willoughby clearly distances himself from her and does not take any responsibility for her suffering: “That I should ever have meant more; you will allow to be impossible, when you understand that my affections have been long engaged elsewhere” (173). Marianne is left broken-hearted and unable to eat or sleep. She consequently falls seriously ill, partly causing the illness herself. Barry Roth points out that “disappointed love may have severe physical consequences”, which indeed is the case for Marianne when she later contracts a fever which almost causes her death (158). In fact, Tanner claims that the young Marianne actually does die. After the recovery Marianne’s “vision is clearer, but her energy is turned to languor.” She has been “tamed” to fit in the social pattern of that time (379). The illness is, however, part of Marianne’s learning experience which enables her to move on in life and find love with another man. She shows the insights she has gained when she tells Elinor that “I see in my
behaviour since the beginning of our acquaintance nothing but a series of imprudence towards myself…my feelings had prepared my sufferings and the illness brought on by myself” (322).

Although love treats her brutally, Marianne eventually finds happiness. Her happiness does not take the form that she had anticipated or initially hoped for, but the suffering as regards Willoughby makes Marianne reconsider what matters in terms of marriage and life. The narrator “holds to the principle that happiness is more likely to be achieved from unpromising beginnings” and concludes that “Marianne was born to an extraordinary fate (Gillie 39). She was born to discover the falsehood of her own opinions and to counteract, by her conduct, her most favourite maxims” (352). In the end, she finds herself marrying a man whom she previously considered too old instead of the dashing young man she had always desired to marry. The narrator shows us that personal feeling should not be the only guide in relationships. Even if she grows much more mature, she still keeps her disposition of doing everything wholeheartedly: “Marianne could never love by halves; and her whole heart became, in time, as much devoted to her husband, as it had once been to Willoughby” (352). Simons supports this by stating that “although she certainly changes from the passionate being into a more tranquil character, Austen never denies the intensity of her emotions” (43). One thing, however, does change; she reduces the focus on her own feelings and becomes increasingly concerned about the well-being of others, in particular her husband as she “found her own happiness in forming his” (352). On top of it all, her economic preference is fulfilled as she “gets her two thousand a year, though from a different lover”, who in fact turns out to be a true romantic spirit (Copeland 133).

Compared to Lucy’s mercenary approach, Marianne’s uncontrolled passion illuminates a complete opposite perspective on marriage. These two extremes show us that neither of them is the right way towards real happiness. Certainly Lucy receives money and a superficial form of happiness, but in the end the lesson is learnt from Marianne who goes from almost
succumbing to her emotions to a more realistic approach. Thanks to this, she is rewarded with both money and true happiness. The success of this balanced middle way leads us to the next chapter and the last protagonist – Elinor. What are her principles on choice of husband and how does she cope with the issue of money versus love?
Chapter 3: The Balanced Elinor Dashwood

Elinor, the eldest Dashwood sister, is the third protagonist to be scrutinized. She provides the story with a clear-cut contrast to both Lucy and Marianne, and embodies a more balanced approach to life. She neither lets her sense nor her sensibility dictate her life or the decisions she makes like Lucy and Marianne. Like the two preceding chapters, the third will describe Elinor’s situation in life, go on to analyse her manners and personality traits, and finally contrast her motives for marriage with those of Lucy and Marianne. We will see that there are major differences but also some similarities in the three women’s conduct and points of departure as regards marriage and life in general. Does one have to opt for either money or love, or is it possible to choose a middle road? This is the question posed for this chapter.

The foundations of Elinor’s life are the same as Marianne’s. She has the same origin and thus shares the same fate as Marianne, in other words she belongs to the same respectable family which after the father’s death must struggle with limited financial assets. Although Elinor is the eldest daughter in her father’s last marriage, she is not entitled to inherit any part of his fortune. Like her mother and sisters, she is dependent on the good will of her half-brother John and other relatives. Hence, marriage is as important to Elinor as to Marianne and Lucy since it is the key to a comfortable and secure life. Unfortunately for all of them, their lack of family fortune complicates matters and makes all three women – from a societal point of view – less attractive as wives.

The less money one possesses the more looks and appearance matter. Although not as handsome as Marianne, Elinor has a “delicate complexion, regular features, and a remarkably pretty figure” (48). Furthermore, her mind is reflected in the “correctness” of her figure, which indicates her correctness of manner (48). In the same way Marianne’s youthful beauty and colourful complexion reflect her sparkling personality.
Aside from good looks, Elinor is polite, considerate, and treats everyone with respect. Her perfectly civil manners speak for themselves; she always says or does what is expected of her, and Gilbert & Gubar contrast Elinor’s “silent, reserved and eminently proper behaviour with the improperly behaved Marianne” (156). Because of Marianne’s frank behaviour, Elinor is forced to “tell lies when politeness requires it,” although she still does it “with less warmth than Lucy” (118). Thus Elinor manages to find a middle way between these two extremes. In terms of politeness and self-restraint, however, Elinor and Lucy are more alike than either is to Marianne. As they discuss Edward’s affections, “their words remain polite and controlled, but there is a subtext of mutually understood hostility”, which means that these two women manage to behave correctly even though strong feelings are involved and they are both well aware of the position of the other (Simons 72).

In nineteenth-century society, following social codes was crucial. Elinor is very much aware of them and encourages Marianne to follow them by “once or twice suggesting the propriety of some self-command” initially without any success (54). Tanner stresses Elinor’s social responsibility by stating that she is “constantly trying to smooth and harmonize potentially abrasive and discordant occasions” caused by others (364). Marianne’s conduct in particular demands Elinor’s attention as she feels it necessary to compensate for Marianne’s incivility. Moreover, Tanner claims that “Elinor, with her unselfish tact, her instinct for arranging and keeping up appearances, and her modifying and reconciling powers, is clearly an indispensable member of society” (377). She knows how to stay within the given frames of societal propriety. This she does very skilfully, unlike Marianne and Lucy, who both attract far more attention in the social circle, one of them by expressing intense emotions in public and the other by being bold enough to make claims on a man who is out of her league.

Even though she is only nineteen years old, good sense is the leading attribute of Elinor’s personality. She has the ability to think first and act afterwards, thus gaining the advantage of
making well-reasoned decisions. From the beginning, Elinor’s practical abilities are evident. Her clear-sighted opinion is highly valued and her “advice is so effectual that she is the counsellor of her mother” (8). In fact, she is the one who finds a new home and arranges the move. Her maturity is shown by the fact that she is the one who must restrain her family from living beyond their means. In other words, Elinor is the much-needed realist of the family.

She also shows her sense and reality-based reasoning when she worries about the consequences of Marianne’s and Willoughby’s friendship: “her heart was not so much at ease, nor her satisfaction in their amusements so pure” since she is afraid of the consequences of this rapid intimacy. Unsurprisingly, her suspicions are soon verified (55).

Elinor is a self-controlled woman and certainly masters her own feelings. Jones emphasizes Elinor’s “understanding and judgement which make her able to govern…her own strong feelings” (25-26). She is rarely overwhelmed by her feelings like Marianne; neither does she demonstrate them in public. Only in private does she consider herself “at liberty to think and be wretched” (Sense and Sensibility 129). On the contrary, and unlike Marianne, Elinor controls even the most powerful feelings so that “no one would have supposed that Elinor was mourning in secret over obstacles which must divide her forever from the object of her love” (135). Perhaps her caution helps her control her feelings since she avoids situations where she knows she might be hurt, for example she is reluctant to go to London since she might encounter Edward there. Moreover, she “responds to feeling with action” and finds ways of making herself useful instead (Rouff 25). Comforting the distraught Marianne helps Elinor to deal with her own frustration on the subject.

In line with this, Elinor knows much more than she shows. Her character is full of insight, but she does not necessarily show it to other people. She secretly detests Lucy, but never gives in to displaying this: “she assured her, and with great sincerity, that she did pity her,” which of course she does not (219). Instead, she is determined not to reveal her inner pain to
Lucy: “she could not deny herself the comfort of endeavouring to convince Lucy that her heart was unwounded” (136). As a result, Lucy is denied the pleasure of enjoying Elinor’s misery and Elinor’s self-respect is maintained.

Furthermore, Elinor’s personality is characterized by respectfulness. Unlike Lucy and Marianne she refuses to speak ill of people. Lucy calls Robert Ferrars “silly and a coxcomb” (142) and Marianne claims that Brandon has “neither genius, taste, nor spirit” (53). If the scorn concerns someone she knows, Elinor tries to convey a more balanced view in order to defend him or her. In the latter case, she sides with Brandon and finds Marianne’s remark “prejudiced and unjust” (53). Furthermore, Elinor is a broadminded and forgiving person who seeks explanations for actions and utterances rather than jumping to conclusions or judging on an unfounded basis. Naturally, she is deeply hurt when she realises that Edward is engaged. She does not, however, dislike him but soon pitys him more than herself: “his imprudence had made her miserable for a while; but it seemed to have deprived himself of ever being otherwise” (134). Above all, this reaction stresses Elinor’s lack of selfishness – even when facing her own misery she still worries more about other people than herself and takes on the role as “the comforter of others in her own distress, no less than in theirs” (245). In summary, this shows Elinor as a considerate and compassionate woman. She pities Brandon as she “had reason to believe that the misery of disappointed love had already been known by him” and – unlike Marianne – does not make judgements based on first impressions or the views of others (56).

In contrast to Lucy, Elinor puts great value on duty. She keeps Lucy’s secret to herself for four months, even though it certainly is a heavy burden to carry: “I owed it to my family and friends not to create in them solicitude about me” (246). Once more her lack of selfishness is shown. She feels the loss of Edward, but she still cannot allow herself to expose her grief to other people. Although Elinor is not indifferent to her own misfortune, she is not heartbroken
in the way that Marianne demonstrates after being rejected by Willoughby. She is reasonable about it and accepts that Edward will marry Lucy since it is now his obligation: “I wish him very happy. I am so sure of his always doing his duty, that though he might harbour some regret, in the end he must become so [happy]” (246). She understands and values Edward’s sense of duty. Even though it affects her negatively, she “gloried in his integrity” (253). In fact, Elinor could never respect and love a man who breaks his promises, which would have been the case if he had abandoned Lucy.

Elinor’s reaction to Lucy’s revelation shows that she possesses not only sense but also a good deal of sensibility. The narrator tells us early on that Elinor has feelings: “her disposition is affectionate, her feelings are strong” (8). However, she has her own way of dealing with them. As we have seen, she controls them in society to avoid becoming the target of public gossip. Additionally, she hides her suffering and pain from the people closest to her. There are several reasons for this: firstly, she cannot break her promise to Lucy. Secondly, she wants to protect Edward from public disgrace, and thirdly, she wants to spare her family even more misery. Only when there is no such need can Elinor express her feelings freely. When she sees Marianne reading Willoughby’s letter, she “felt immediately such a sickness at heart as made her hardly able to hold up her head” resulting in “a burst of tears, which at first was scarcely less violent than Marianne’s” (172-3). In other words, not even Elinor can at all times withhold overwhelming feelings of sorrow and joy. Likewise, when she realises that Edward is unattached and free to marry her “it required several hours to give sedateness to her spirits and any degree of tranquillity to her heart” (338).

Nevertheless, Elinor is in general more moderate and disagrees with Marianne who thinks that “the business of self-command is settled very easily; – with strong affections it was impossible, with calm ones it could have no merit” (102). According to Ballaster, Elinor’s approach is based on “the insistence that desires be silent, whereas Marianne requires them to
be spoken” (xvii). Even though Elinor, in comparison with Marianne, sometimes seems to be less in contact with her feelings, she still is equipped with reliable intuition. She trusts her judgement and is convinced that Edward loves her instead of Lucy: “his affection was all her own. She could not have been deceived in that” (133).

Throughout the novel Elinor displays her balance of sense and sensibility. She follows a path somewhere between rationality and romance which combines sharp-edged realism with warm feelings. Compared to Marianne, Elinor hardly develops throughout the story. As Gillie argues, she is one of Austen’s heroines “who do not possess her virtues, but is the virtues” (108). Elinor’s character is the idealized one, but both sisters demonstrate a blend of personal qualities: “Marianne has plenty of sense and Elinor is by no means devoid of sensibility, which alone should convince us that Austen knew that nothing comes unmixed…but in combinations” (Tanner 357). After Marianne’s development into a more mature woman, she joins Elinor in Austen’s collection of characters who display a good balance of sense and sensibility in their personality.

If Lucy prioritizes money and the young Marianne love as the basis for marriage, Elinor positions herself somewhere in between these extremes. She has a realistic approach to matrimony as she acknowledges that “wealth has much to do with happiness [in marriage]” (90). She knows that a certain degree of financial independence is required for a comfortable life; hence her wishes are for a husband with an acceptable income. Still, a balanced mind is not content with money only. She seeks love to accompany it, which is yet another reference to her balance of sense and sensibility. To her, love is a much wider concept than to Marianne. Elinor does not primarily look for a passionate and ravishing young man like Marianne does, but seeks qualities such as respect, compatibility, trust, and loyalty. Conveniently enough, the man she singles out is both of a good family and, like her, equipped with a balanced disposition: “he was not handsome and his manners required intimacy to
make them pleasing, but when his natural shyness was overcome, his behaviour gave every indication of an open affectionate heart” (17). Even though the courtship and love between Elinor and Edward is sparingly displayed throughout the novel, it is made clear how well-suited they are. They have many personality traits in common and clearly are attracted to each other. Moreover, they both are very civil, and deal with adversity in the same way.

Nevertheless, we might suspect that Elinor would not have let herself fall in love with Edward had he been of small fortune and questionable family. He was an eligible young man when she chose him and she could not have foreseen that he would be disinherited and disowned. In fact, she does not dare to commit herself completely to Edward until they gain the blessing of Mrs. Ferrars and thus secure financial support and family acceptance. Their shared realistic approach to marriage is shown as “neither of them were quite enough in love to think that three hundred and fifty pounds a year would supply them with the comforts of life” (343). Nevertheless, Elinor’s marriage is the one that is most strongly rooted in love compared to Marianne’s and Lucy’s – even if the former eventually finds deep love with Brandon and the latter is content with sharing a large fortune with the other Ferrars brother. All in all, Elinor’s choice reflects both her sense and her sensibility, and by being the balanced woman that she is, she is rewarded with a truly good husband.

Regarding the social consequences of Elinor’s choice of husband, an interesting paradox can be observed. As readers, we wish Elinor to be happy. She has suffered bravely, and should be rewarded with both social and personal success. This, however, does not come about. Unlike some of Austen’s other heroines, Elinor’s success in the end is middling. While others achieve the dual success of a handsome and respectable man, a substantial income, and a prominent position as the mistress of a country estate, Elinor receives a man who has been disinherited and disgraced, and whom she can only marry because of the generosity of Brandon’s financial support. In other words, some women’s marriages mean advancement in
society, whereas Elinor is left without superior social status. Furthermore, Mrs. Ferrars only reluctantly accepts Elinor as a daughter-in-law. Lucy is still her favourite and Elinor can never compete with her on that account. Because of their lack of social success, Elinor and Edward spend their married life far away from elegance and extravagance.

Yet, marrying Edward brings Elinor all that she desires in life. She is not dependent on social affirmation for finding happiness, and is thus not disturbed by the retired life they lead. She measures contentment and joy on a different scale, prioritising values such as respect and mutual understanding. Judging by these standards, she truly is rewarded with everything she wishes for. Her happiness is furthermore completed by being near her mother and sisters. Her marriage “divided her as little from her family as could well be contrived” (351). Mrs. Jennings confirms the couple’s personal success by finding Elinor and Edward “one of the happiest couples in the world” leaving them only to “wish for the marriage of Brandon and Marianne, and a better pasture for their cows” (348). Once more, their marital joy contra their lack of wealth is evident.

In conclusion, the three girls’ fates demonstrate the balance between love and money which Austen wants to convey. The marriage based on money is shown as an alliance founded in self-interest and greed, whereas the projected marriage of passion self-destructs and causes substantial emotional distress. We do, however, end up with two balanced marriages – those of Elinor and Edward, and Marianne and Brandon – which “symbolise reconciliation and harmony” (Jones 50). Hence, the ideal marriage is based on realistic material consideration in conjunction with true love and mutual respect. Only through this delicate balance can real happiness be achieved.
Chapter 4: Sense and Sensibility in the Classroom

So how can we use the findings of this essay for didactic purposes? Why is the world of Sense and Sensibility an interesting and worthwhile study for secondary-school students? How can the choices and fates of our three young women be brought into a wider context and be related to the modern world? How can teachers practically design such classroom work? These are questions we set out to answer in this chapter.

First of all, we might consider why it is important to teach literature in school. The most obvious answer is that literature is crammed with history and culture. It constitutes an embodiment of our collective past. Thus, passing on our literary heritage to the next generation is an obligation. The classics are included in the canon for a reason and are rightly part of public knowledge. Furthermore, analysing literature means developing critical-thinking skills both in terms of grasping the overall context and examining details. However, literature is not just an illustration of culture and history, but also language in use and working with literature serves the purpose of exploring the aesthetics of language. This concerns many aspects, including beauty, expressiveness, elegance and style. John McRae also points out that studying literature exposes students to different forms of the English language and allows them to expand their vocabulary (33). Finally, Skolverket stresses the diversity of studying literature: "eleverna ska ges möjlighet att utveckla kunskaper om livsvillkor, samhällsfrågor och kulturella företeelser i olika sammanhang och delar av världen där engelska används" (Swedish National Curriculum, Skolverket). These are all important aspects of foreign-language teaching and confirm the legitimate role of literature in the classroom.

The next question to address is why Austen and her novels are suitable objects of study. Certainly she covers all of the features mentioned above and thus makes a good point of departure in the educational context. By the perceptive portrayal of her own world, she conveys both the cultural heritage of Britain and elegance of language. In other words, Sense
and Sensibility is a key to a distant world which provides a contrast to our own. The novel depicts a society ruled by gender-based social and cultural codes (Rouff 104). Nevertheless, though rules and conventions may differ, in the end human beings are the same. Austen’s focus on young people makes her appropriate reading for upper-secondary students. They are in many ways faced with the same problems as Austen’s characters and similarly struggle to find their identity and way in life. We still need to balance our own desires with the demands of society, which strongly links us to Austen’s world. Hence, literature education “empowers student to reflect on and potentially reshape themselves and their world” (Judith Langer 1).

So how can we go about adapting Austen to classroom work? What can we learn from her novels? Ronald Carter & McRae argue that the teaching of literature should ideally focus on student-centred activities which “aim to involve students with the text, to develop their perceptions of it and to help them explore and express those perceptions” (xxii). Murat Hişmanoğlu, basing his work on S. Stern, agrees with this and argues that teaching literature in a foreign language should be divided into three levels. Firstly, there needs to be a set of questions referring to the basic facts of the text. Can we agree on what it is all about? In order to continue on to the other levels, we need to come to a consensus regarding plot, characters, and setting. Secondly, students should interpret the plot and the characters. Is there a message and what is the author trying to say to us? Thirdly, students should be encouraged to work collaboratively, thus sharing their personal reactions and their assessment of the novel’s characters and central themes. This last level appeals to students’ imagination and should promote their problem-solving skills. Questions designed for this level are a good starting point for both oral and written activities (57).

Moving on to the practical details, Sense and Sensibility might be too extensive a novel for students in upper-secondary school to read, but this need not necessarily constitute a problem. One way of bypassing this is to let the students read a number of excerpts from the novel,
combined with watching the screen version. The first three chapters introduce the topic of money and love, as Austen right from the start informs us of the importance of economic status. In Chapter 1, the Dashwoods are introduced. Of course, this includes their financial situation and the worsening of it when the father dies. Chapter 2 consists mainly of a satirically portrayed conversation on money between Fanny and John Dashwood who embody the widespread greed in society. Finally, Chapter 3 describes Elinor’s sense and Marianne’s sensibility and sets the scene as regards different approaches to marriage. In addition, Chapter 7 must be included since it describes the first acquaintance with Lucy Steele. Ideally, this should be enough to create some interest among the students.

In order to give the students access to the whole story without having to read the ensuing 350 pages, it would be a good idea to show an adaptation of the book to the screen. Either Ang Lee’s and Emma Thompson’s film from 1995, or the BBC series from 2008 would be convenient. The film would then serve the purpose of familiarizing the class with the rest of the story. Before starting the actual work on the book, however, the students also should read the three last chapters. The reason for this is to give extra emphasis to the outcome of the story, which is much more thoroughly done in the book, especially as regards Lucy. After the teacher has given a short introduction to the novel, including the aim of studying it, the actual reading of the text will start. It is important that the students actually start to read, therefore they will be given time in class to read the first chapter. This is to make sure that they leave the classroom with at least some impressions and thoughts on the book. The reading of the ensuing chapters will be assigned as homework, but the film will, of course, be shown in class.

Returning to Hişmanoğlu’s three-level approach to literature, the purpose of the first level is to check the students’ overall understanding of the book. Hence, the teacher should pose questions regarding the general contents of the book, such as: what is Lucy’s situation in life
and what does she want from marriage? What is Marianne’s situation and what does she strive for regarding marriage? What is Elinor’s situation and how does she approach marriage? Here students first work individually, and then compare their conclusions in small groups. Of course, the teacher needs to be available and check with each group that they have grasped the gist of the story.

On the second level, students should be given a set of analytical questions. This level will use the findings of the essay on the consideration of money versus love. The students will be asked to reflect on Austen’s message to the reader. What is her advice to her young women? Should they aim for love or money when making such a life-changing decision that marriage unquestionably means? What does Austen convey about the girls’ definitions of happiness? Do they learn anything and if so, what does life teach them? Finally, what does true love mean to Austen? At this stage, students are encouraged to share their opinions and discuss the study questions in small groups. Afterwards, the outcome of these group discussions will be presented in class.

The aim of the third level is to put the thoughts from the text analysis into a wider context. Is the balanced approach to life conveyed in Sense and Sensibility still a truth universally acknowledged? In order to investigate this, we need to apply the findings of the analysis at the second level to the modern world. Thus, we must relocate the girls and consider what their situation would be in present-day society. The crucial point is to deal with how society has changed. Starting points for this discussion would be what women’s situation looks like today, taking aspects such as parental influence, career expectations, and marital expectations into consideration. We need to reflect on how Lucy, Marianne and Elinor would reason if they lived in our society. Has our independent lifestyle enabled us to sidestep the considerations that were so important in the nineteenth century? If not, how do we think today – are we all
Lucys, Mariannes, or Elinors? Or do we agree with Austen that a balance between material needs and emotional contentment is most desirable?

The third level allows students to be creative. They will be asked to individually brainstorm ideas regarding love vs. money today. These thoughts will form the foundation of an essay which they may choose to write on either Lucy, Marianne, or Elinor. The task will consist in putting one of the girls in a modern context and writing a scenario corresponding to her situation and her approach to marriage. Since society nowadays is much more equal, it would be important to point out that not only women, but also men must take the same aspects into consideration. Therefore, it certainly would be acceptable for students to write their essay from a man’s point of view if they prefer to do so, as long as his position on love and money reflects that of one of the girls’. This essay will provide the students with an opportunity to collect all their thoughts on the novel’s theme and simultaneously link it to their own world. Hopefully, students will enjoy carrying out a creative task after spending some time on reading and analysing questions. The final exercise on Sense and Sensibility will be to exchange and read each other’s modern scenarios in small groups. Perhaps someone will even want to read his or hers to the class, which of course would be both welcomed and most likely very appreciated.

To sum up, there are several benefits from using Sense and Sensibility in the classroom. First of all, it gives students a first acquaintance with Jane Austen and the world she lived in. This hopefully will inspire students to continue reading Austen’s works, as well as promote further interest in literature in general. Moreover, it provides students with a sense of the past and enables them to see the similarities between the past and the present. Young people have always been forced to make critical decisions and struggle for independence, security and personal happiness. Reading older literature also helps students to put their own lives into perspective. It gives them a different angle from which they can measure their own lives and
the choices they make. But most of all, the reading of *Sense and Sensibility* offers the students enjoyable reading and the possibility of becoming absorbed by the wit and beauty of language which conveys the complexities of life in early nineteenth-century England.
Conclusion

The purpose of this essay was to show how differently the female characters in Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* – Lucy Steele, Marianne Dashwood and Elinor Dashwood – approach the question of marriage. We have seen two extremes in the money-obsessed Lucy and the love-focused Marianne, as well as Elinor’s balanced idea of what should constitute a good marriage. The argument was that Austen supports an ideal balance between love and money when choosing a husband, which has been analysed through the girls’ personalities, their motives for marriage as well as the ensuing consequences of their choices.

The first chapter dealt with Lucy Steele and her mercenary position on matrimony. It was shown that the intensity of her affections coincide with the income of her beau, which provides her with a mainly superficial form of happiness, but also results in a considerable step up the social ladder. In Chapter 2 we went on to find Marianne Dashwood’s very different point of departure. To her, the basis of marriage unquestionably is – and needs to be – love, the more passionate, the better. This, however, proves to be a nearly fatal attitude, as her profound commitment to Willoughby, and particularly the parting from him, almost kills her. Only when she learns to acknowledge the inner virtues of other people does she find true happiness. The third chapter discussed Elinor’s realistic yet emotional approach to marriage. Both Marianne and Elinor find true happiness, but lose the possibility to enjoy a high-status social life in the process. Finally, the fourth chapter dealt with the didactic potential of the novel and suggested some guidelines on teaching Austen.

The results of the study are in part somewhat ironic. In an ideal world, Elinor’s and Marianne’s suffering would entitle them to both personal and social success. Nevertheless, life is not fair and it is the mercenary Lucy who achieves the greatest social success while the other two live quiet lives in the countryside. At first glance this may come as a surprise to the reader, but if the society depicted in *Sense and Sensibility* as a whole – and the real world for
that matter – is examined, it seems that the false, greedy, and ingratiating people are the ones enjoying the largest incomes and the highest social status. The John Dashwoods, the Ferrars, and the Middletons are all vanity, egoism, and pride embodied. In contrast to this unattractive group of people, the Dashwood sisters and their husbands constitute a world based on a different set of values. They find domestic happiness in terms of love, trust, and loyalty, none of which is particularly highly valued in the society of this age. Thus the moral of the novel is that living a life based on honourable values is the reward worth having. Certainly the emptiness of society life stresses the contrast between wealth and good morals and leaves us to reflect on what really matters in life. Outwardly, people like Lucy may be a social success, but most readers would not wish to befriend them but rather people like the Dashwood sisters instead. This underlines the importance of bringing Lucy and her devious ways into the discussion on values and virtues in life.

Finally, this essay’s contribution to the critical picture is the insights gained by comparing our three girls and the consequences of the choices they make. Above all, Lucy and her influence on the lives of the other characters supplement the traditional approach which focuses on Elinor and Marianne alone. The ideas on how this study’s results can be used in the classroom also add a new dimension to *Sense and Sensibility*. In the end, the world full of crucial choices faced by the characters in all of Austen’s novels, including our three girls, can tell us something about human life and society in general. We can apply the findings and insights of this essay to our own lives and the world we live in, thus realising that we are dealing with the same issues today. The fact that we can recognise ourselves in the characters and their personal ordeals also makes Austen well-suited for young people to read. By learning to appreciate moral qualities and to approach important decisions with a balance of sense and sensibility in mind, they are provided with potential guidance for situations yet to come in life.
Works Cited

Primary Source

Secondary Sources


