

Eligible

Curtis Sittenfeld

Reviewed by: Madison Li, 16

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Eligible by Curtis Sittenfeld is a modern adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, a famous 18th-century romance novel. Sittenfeld makes Austen's ideas more accessible by applying her themes about family, love, and society to a more contemporary setting. The original characters are revamped into early 21st century versions of themselves, but their personalities and the plot remain true to Austen's vision.

Eligible is told from the perspective of witty, independent 38-year-old Liz Bennet, the second-oldest sister of the Bennet family. When her sardonic father finds himself in the hospital, Liz pauses her life in NYC to return to Cincinnati and take care of her family. During this endeavor, she becomes re-involved in Cincinnati high society. While her airheaded mother Mrs. Bennet pressures Liz and her older sister Jane to get married, their three younger sisters Mary, Kitty, and Lydia continue to live at home, refusing to find employment or help out around the house. Then, handsome, popular Chip Bingley, a reality TV star and doctor from a rich family, arrives in the city with his friend Fitzwilliam Darcy, a cold, arrogant neurosurgeon, also heir to tremendous wealth. Kind and innocent Jane becomes involved with Bingley, while Liz struggles to define her relationships with Darcy (the unfathomable newcomer), Jasper (her long-time best-friend/bling), and Willie (her eccentric cousin who can't take a hint). The author offers a seamlessly woven narrative in *Eligible* that follows Liz as she navigates family drama, financial troubles, romance, career difficulties, and all the other complexities of life.

In some ways, the book is almost like a reality show. *Eligible* is organized by chapters of varying length; some are as brief as half a page in order to emphasize the breaks in time/events/perspectives. Substantial dialogue allows readers to enjoy the Bennet family banter, which is both relatable and hilarious. Despite the new format, the author nonetheless maintains Austen's distinctive themes: the story revolves around the Bennet sisters, while emphasizing the bond of family through hardship.

Eligible contains some heavy themes and mature language, aptly incorporated considering that the main characters are all adults. It also broaches a multitude of cultural controversies, including gender identity, sexual orientation, and marital affairs. For this reason, I'd recommend *Eligible* to teenagers and adults, who will be able to better understand the subtle intricacies and tensions behind conflicts. Whether you've already read the classic *Pride and Prejudice* or not, the author's engaging illustration of the characters' lives and relationships with each other will make you want more of the Bennet family. I wouldn't be surprised if this book convinced you to read or reread Jane Austen's original work next!

Recommended Titles:

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

Sense and Sensibility by Joanna Trollope

Bridget Jones's Diary by Helen Fielding

The Flight of Gemma Hardy by Margot Livesy

New Girl by Paige Harbison