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CLASSICS

**Simon & Schuster Classroom Activities  
for the Enriched Classic edition of  
*Sense & Sensibility* by Jane Austen  
0-7434-8776-1 • \$4.95 / \$6.95 Can.**

Activities created by Robert Marantz

Each of the three activities includes:

- NCTE standards covered
- An estimate of the time needed
- A complete list of materials needed
- Step-by-step instructions
- Questions to help you evaluate the results

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## **“Sense vs. Sensibility”** **(A Lesson in Character Traits)**

One of the major themes in Sense and Sensibility manifests itself in the form of a debate: Is it better to follow your heart or follow your head? On one side of the argument is Marianne. She “feels everything intensely,” and her excitable state almost leads to her ruin. On the other side of the argument is her older sister Elinor. Elinor is rational and pragmatic, yet her lack of emotion almost leads her to heartbreak. So which sister is better equipped to navigate the adversities they encounter? This is the main thrust of the novel, and this lesson.

We will analyze the results of applying “sense” and “sensibility” approaches to a given situation, and then explore how a combination of the two usually yields the best result.

This lesson will take one class period.

### **NCTE Standards Covered:**

2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their words identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literary communities.

### **What to Do:**

1. Introduce the topic by writing the words “sense” and “sensibility” on the board. Ask the class, how do the words in the title Sense and Sensibility differ? Sense is not equivalent to sensibility. Define each term for the class, being sure to clarify that in Austen’s era, “sensibility” referred to a capacity for emotion, rather than the modern meaning. “Sense,” on the other hand, then as now refers to a capacity for logic, or “common sense.” Note how the title is a metaphor for the two heroines, Elinor (sense) and Marianne (sensibility). Marianne wears her emotions on her sleeve while Elinor keeps them hidden from view. Marianne bursts into any situation head-on while Elinor considers her options. Have the class recall incidents in the novel where each sister displayed her corresponding trait. (For instance, Marianne’s emotional reaction upon seeing Willoughby at the party is a good example of her “sensibility.”)

2. Distribute Handout #1. On it are four scenarios that can each be approached from a “sense” perspective or from a “sensibility” perspective.
3. Have the students write how someone like Marianne would deal with each scenario, and then how someone like Elinor would.
4. When the students finish, ask them whether some scenarios lend themselves better to one perspective over another, or whether a blend of the two approaches is best. This should lead to a discussion of how Marianne and Elinor ultimately incorporate each other’s sense and sensibility in order to achieve their respective happiness.

**What You Need:**

A copy of the Enriched Classic edition of Sense and Sensibility (ISBN: 0743487761) for each student and Handout #1.

**How Did It Go?**

Was the class able to see how well Elinor and Marianne embodied these traits? Did the students appreciate how combining the approaches of “sense” and “sensibility” is usually the best way to handle a situation?

## “The Other Half”

### (A Lesson in Identity)

While Elinor and Marianne are clearly the heroines of Sense and Sensibility, three men have pivotal roles in the book. Edward Ferrars is Elinor’s mirror, a shy man whose reserve, so similar to Elinor’s, almost causes both to miss out on love. John Willoughby is the debonair gent whose grand romantic gestures and impetuosity send Marianne’s heart aflutter. Colonel Brandon is smitten with Marianne, but she finds him too dull at first. Eventually, though, his kindness wins her over.

We view the events of Sense and Sensibility through Elinor and Marianne. But what do these fellows think? In this lesson we will imagine what their innermost thoughts are.

This lesson will take one class period.

#### **NCTE Standards Covered:**

2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their words identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literary communities.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

#### **What to Do:**

1. Divide the class into three groups.
2. Assign one of the three male characters (Edward Ferrars, John Willoughby, Colonel Brandon) to each group.

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3. Each group will create an open-mind diagram of their assigned character on butcher paper. For each diagram, students should note their character's thoughts about each other, Elinor and/or Marianne, love, marriage, money, and status. Students must include quotes from the text to support their analysis.
4. When the groups finish, they will present their diagram to the rest of the class. They will explain how their character views each of the above topics.
5. Students will finish the activity by writing a reflection on the following prompt: Does my assigned character lean more towards "sense" or "sensibility"?
6. A variation on this activity involves splitting the class along gender lines and then having two sets of groups assigned to each of the three characters for a total of six groups. Three of the groups would be comprised entirely of female students, and the other three groups would be all male students. It would be interesting to note any differences in how male students and female students view the characters of Edward Ferrars, John Willoughby, and Colonel Brandon.

### **What You Need:**

A copy of the enriched classic edition of Sense and Sensibility (ISBN: 0743487761) for each student, a roll of butcher paper, and assorted markers and colored pencils.

### **How Did It Go?**

Did the diagram on Edward reflect his main character traits of loyalty and belief in always doing the right thing? For Willoughby's diagram, did the students merely think of him as a cad, or did they acknowledge the conflict within him between romantic and practical pursuits? What did the students think of Colonel Brandon? Was he a goody-two-shoes, or a truly generous spirit?

Activity #3

**“Love & Marriage”**  
(A Lesson in Theme)

It is sometimes difficult for today’s students to relate to Austen’s world, and this is in part because the view of marriage has changed since she wrote Sense and Sensibility.

Marriage is one of the dominant themes of her book. Marriage in Austen’s day was often purely a financial arrangement, and women had little choice as to whom they could marry and why. Of course, today marriage is generally seen in a much different light.

In this lesson we will explore the differences between the idea of marriage in Austen’s world and our own conceptions of the institution. Specifically, we will hold up the characterization of two married couples in the book, Mr. Palmer & Charlotte and John & Fanny Dashwood, as the avatars of Austen’s views and contrast them with our own. Then, we will examine Elinor’s and Marianne’s marriages.

This lesson will take one class period.

**NCTE Standards Covered:**

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their words identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literary communities.

**What to Do:**

1. Start the lesson by asking the class what marriage means to them. What ideas does the word “marriage” evoke? Write their responses on the board under the heading “21st Century.”
2. Next, remind the students that when we first start Sense and Sensibility we meet two different married couples: Mr. Palmer & Charlotte and John & Fanny Dashwood. In fact, these are the only two couples who remain married for the entire book.
3. Prompt the students to describe those two marriages. Write their responses on the board under the heading “19th Century.”
4. Now that you have two lists of words on the board, circle any words that appear on both lists. There may not be very many, and that is the point: our concept of marriage is far different than that of early nineteenth century England.
5. The students should now focus their attention on the non-circled words. Are there common threads on either list? If so, what does that say about how we view marriage? How Austen did? How many of the words on one list are antonyms of words on the other list?
6. Now ask the students to turn their attention to the end of Sense and Sensibility, specifically to the marriages between Elinor and Edward, and Marianne and Colonel Brandon. Have the students call out words or phrases to describe these unions. Do the students use any of the terms in the “21st Century” column?
7. Given that both Elinor and Marianne end up marrying men out of love rather than obligation or money, is Austen ahead of her time or engaging in wishful thinking, considering the time period in which she lived and wrote about? Pose this question to the class either for discussion or as a writing prompt.

**What You Need:**

A copy of the enriched classic edition of Sense and Sensibility (ISBN: 0743487761) for each student

**How Did It Go?**

There should be a marked difference between the 19th and 21st Century lists. The 19th Century list should contain terms and phrases pertaining to money, social standing, and family obligation, while the 21st Century column paints marriage as a result of love and mutual respect.

Directions: For each of the four scenarios below, describe how someone with Elinor’s “sense” would handle to situation and how someone with Marianne’s “sensibility” would.

Scenario	The “Sense” Approach	The “Sensibility” Approach
1. Your best friend wants to date your ex.		
2. Your parents won’t let you go to a concert with your friends.		
3. You see a classmate cheating on a test.		
4. Your after-school job is starting to take too much of your time.		