

# The Jane Austen Book & Film Club

## Persuasion

1. Austen describes Sir Walter Elliot: in the following manner: "Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character; vanity of person and of situation." This quotation implies that Sir Walter's vanity was not confined to his "person." How does Elliot's vanity influence the lives of those around him? Had he not been so vain, how might his daughters' lives have followed different paths? If "vanity" captures Elliot's character, what one word would you assign to the other main characters (Anne, Elizabeth, Mary, and Wentworth)?
2. Women in 19<sup>th</sup> century England were not legally entitled to own property or inherit money from their fathers. How do these restrictions shape the plot of *Persuasion*? How does Austen use the story of the Elliot family to comment on the legal rights of women during her lifetime?
3. Early on we learn the source of the title *Persuasion*: Anne Elliot had been *persuaded* by her family to reject Frederick Wentworth's proposal of marriage seven years earlier. What made Anne vulnerable to her family's persuasion? Do you sense that same vulnerability in her character at the end of the film or novel?
4. At one point in the novel, Anne defends her brother-in-law's absence from his ill child by saying, "Nursing does not belong to a man, it is not his province. A sick child is always the mother's property, her own feelings generally make it so." How do you think a man's "province" and a woman's "province" are defined in *Persuasion*? Which characters seem content to abide by their culture's gender roles, and which characters mutiny against such roles?
5. It is commonly said that when you marry someone, you marry that person's family. Do you believe this to be true? In today's world, how much influence should one's family have on one's decision to marry someone? How does this advice relate to the story of the Elliot children?
6. When Anne and Wentworth first see each other again, what barriers stand between them? Which ones are caused by the strict codes of the society in which they live, and which are more universal? Would a modern-day couple have as much difficulty in such a situation?

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7. Contemporary viewers and readers encountering either the film or text version of *Persuasion* might find the characters' lack of direct confrontation odd or stilted. How might Anne and Wentworth's story have been altered had they communicated freely with one another? What has our society gained or lost by our tendency to air our feelings openly?
8. Mr. Elliot claims that "good company" can be determined by "birth, education and manners." In *Persuasion*, how are these three variables seen as also determining how one might choose a spouse? Which of these variables is valued the most in *Persuasion*? Which of these variables is valued the most in modern society?
9. *Persuasion* begins with Anne leaving her ancestral home unmarried and unsure of her place in the world, and it ends with her return. What experiences and realizations do you think Anne had to have in order to make this triumphant return? What message is being sent to the viewer by ending the film with the vision of Anne's return to Kellynch-hall?