

INTRODUCTION

Suitable for: Ages 12+

Includes: Extracts from the text and corresponding discussion questions and activities

Themes: The Life of Jane Austen; Love and Marriage; Taking a Look at Scandal; Heroines

CONTENTS

- **EXTRACT 1: The Life of Jane Austen (taken from Chapter 31 – The parsonage, Godmersham Park)**
Objectives: Discuss the context of late 18th and early 19th century England; select implicit and explicit details about Jane Austen's life from the text.
- **EXTRACT 2: Love and Marriage (taken from Chapter 1 – Fanny's bedroom, Godmersham Park)**
Objectives: Role play two characters' feelings on love and marriage; write two separate diary entries based on a role play.
- **EXTRACT 3: Scandal (taken from Chapter 14 – The library, Godmersham Park)**
Objectives: Consider the different scandals explored in the text; plan and write a 19th century newspaper article on a scandal from the story.
- **EXTRACT 4: Heroines (taken from Chapter 37 – The library, Godmersham Park)**
Objectives: Reflect on a number of different literary heroines you have studied; research a literary heroine from the past, and then present what you have learned about them to the class.

ABOUT THE BOOK

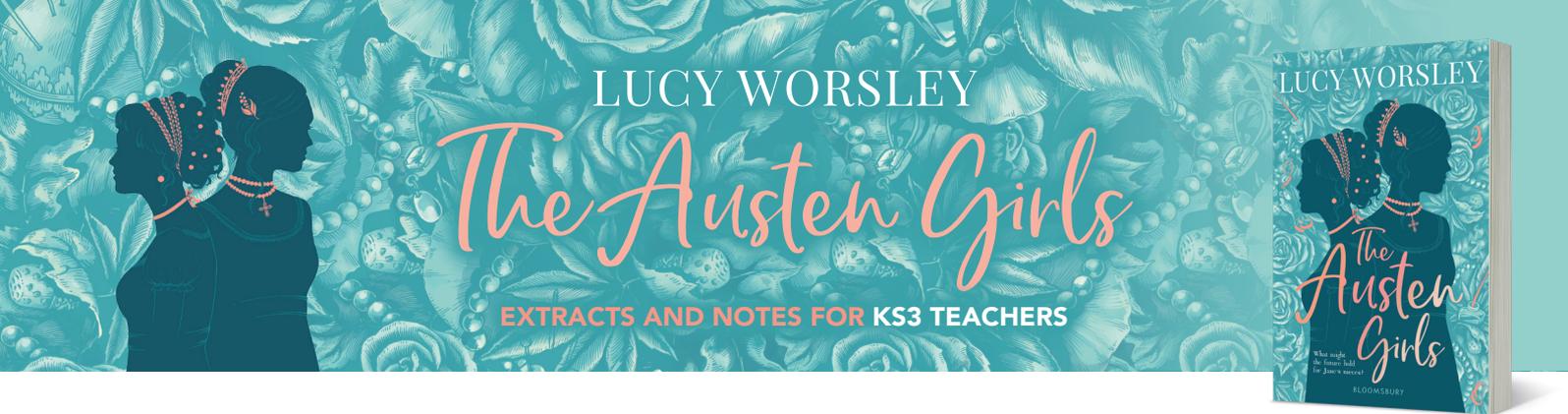
Would she ever find a real-life husband? Would she even find a partner to dance with at tonight's ball? She just didn't know.

Anna Austen has always been told she must marry rich. Her future depends upon it. While her dear cousin Fanny has a little more choice, she too is under pressure to find a suitor.

But how can either girl know what she wants? Is finding love even an option? The only person who seems to have answers is their Aunt Jane. She has never married. In fact, she's perfectly happy, so surely being single can't be such a bad thing?

The time will come for each of the Austen girls to become the heroines of their own stories. Will they follow in Jane's footsteps?

In this witty, sparkling novel of choices, popular historian LUCY WORSLEY brings alive the delightful life of Jane Austen as you've never seen it before.



EXTRACT 1: THE LIFE OF JANE AUSTEN (Taken from Chapter 31 – The parsonage, Godmersham Park)

‘Well,’ he said, smiling at her solemnly, ‘I read a marvellous book. *Pride and Prejudice*. We spoke about it before. So, I wrote to the author, at the address of the publisher, a long letter saying what I liked about it and how clever I thought it, and saying a few words about my own position as a young curate with good intentions but no situation. And to my surprise, I got a letter back. It was not only from the author herself, whose ... sex ... was quite other than I had imagined, but it also contained a most kind, most generous, offer of a post. She said she thought she might enjoy – as she put it – having a literary parson.’

He looked intently at Fanny, and must have seen that he was saying nothing that she hadn’t begun to deduce for herself.

‘And was it ...?’ she began.

‘Yes, it was,’ he said simultaneously.

‘... Aunt Jane!’

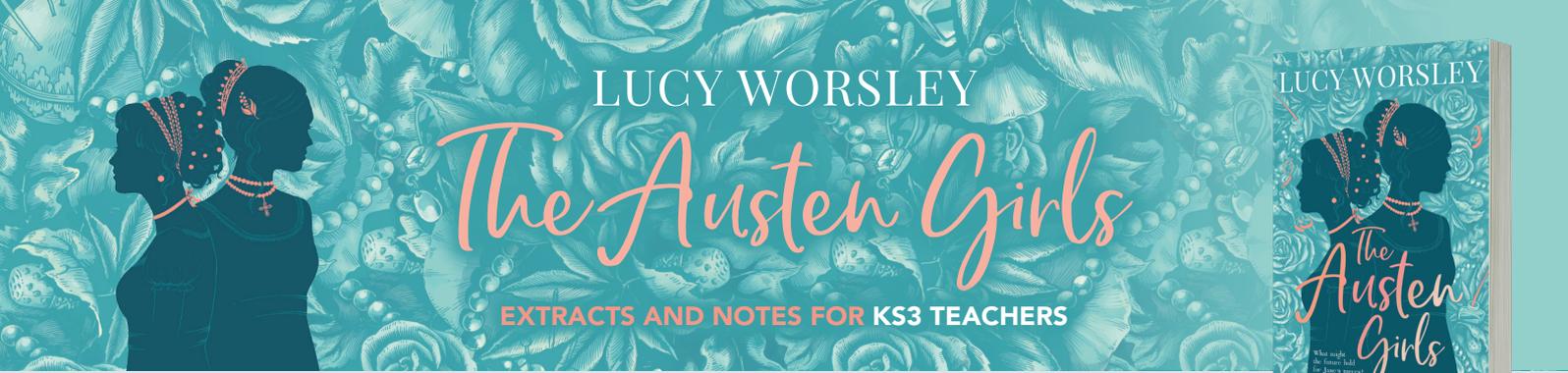
Fanny leaped to her feet, and almost clapped her hands.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

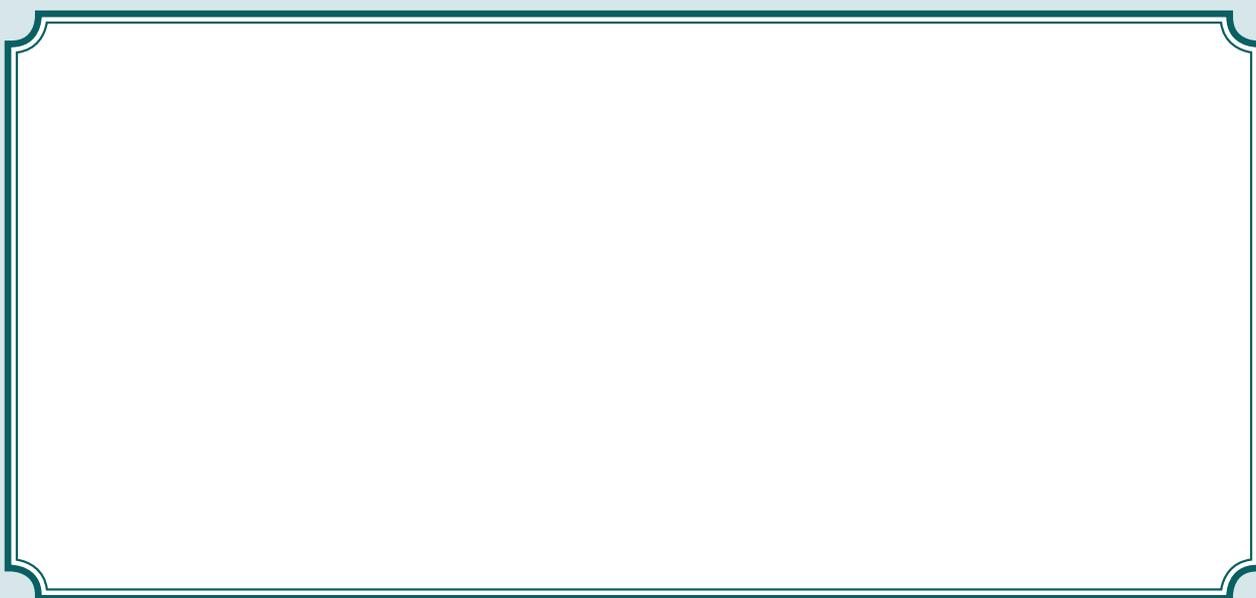
- What did you already know about Jane Austen before reading the story? Share with a partner.
- How has the text given you extra sight into the life of Jane Austen and her family?
- In the extract, why was Mr Drummer so surprised at the letter he received back from ‘the author’?
- What is Fanny’s relationship like with her aunt? Why does Fanny find her aunt such an inspiration?
- Which characters bear most similarities to Aunt Jane’s character? Which characters are most different to her?

ACTIVITY: THE AUTHOR HERSELF

- In *The Austen Girls*, the writer embeds a lot of factual information about Jane Austen’s life in the story she tells. Use the Epilogue on pages 283–286 as a starting point and note down key details about Jane Austen’s life. Use the worksheet provided. Then, think and look back over the rest of the story and other work you have done on Jane Austen to complete your worksheet with as much information as possible.
- In the large rectangular box in the centre, draw a sketch of Jane Austen. In your drawing, try to convey something about Jane’s life and character. For instance, you could draw her writing at her desk, or with Godmersham Park behind her. Think about what fashion was like in the late 18th and early 19th century to make Jane’s appearance as accurate as possible.
- Feedback the work you have done as a class and add in any extra ideas that you might have missed. By the end of the lesson, you should have lots of biographical notes that will help you in future lessons and when studying Jane Austen in the future.



JANE AUSTEN: THE AUTHOR HERSELF



Family life and friends

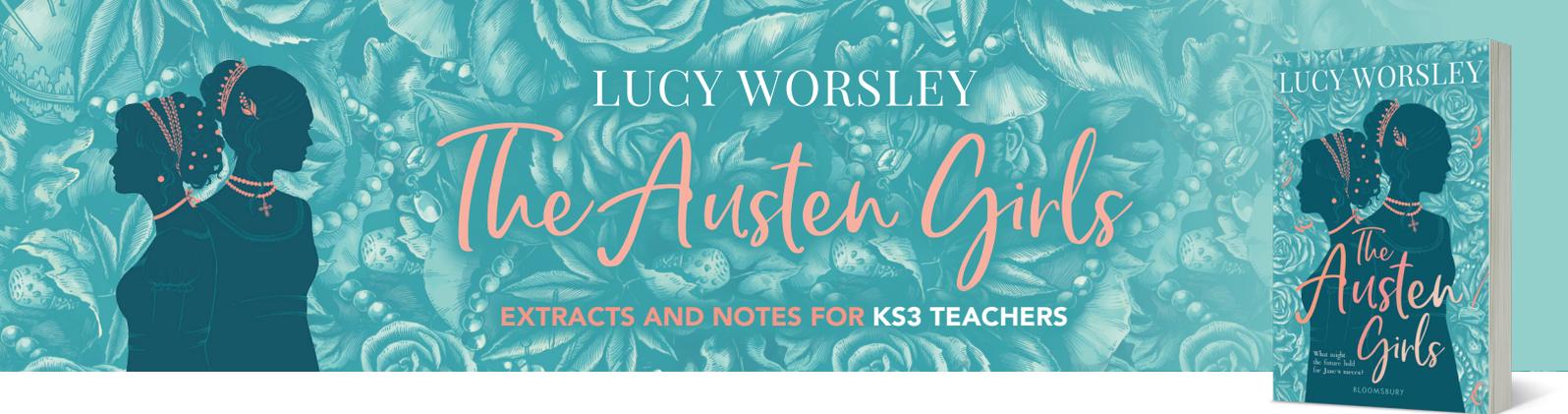
Context - late 18th
and early 19th century
England

Other key biographical
details

Education and career

Love and marriage

Her legacy



EXTRACT 2: LOVE AND MARRIAGE (Taken from Chapter 1 – Fanny’s bedroom, Godmersham Park)

‘Fanny,’ Anna continued, suddenly serious, ‘do you have a secret feeling, deep down, that you’ll never, ever get a husband?’ She was pouting at her own reflection, turning her head this way and that.

Fanny dug her fingers into the soft, rich, comforting carpet. Would she ever find a real-life husband? Would she even find a partner to dance with at tonight’s ball? She just didn’t know. But what she did know was that getting married was the only topic she, her cousin and her sisters ever talked about here at Godmersham Park. Marriage – a ‘good’ marriage, as Fanny’s mother always said, to ‘the right sort of man’ – was the goal towards which Fanny’s life had been building.

Fanny often imagined that moment of the proposal, the way she would gasp, clasp her hands to her mouth and run, run, ever so fast, to tell her mother and sisters and Anna what had happened.

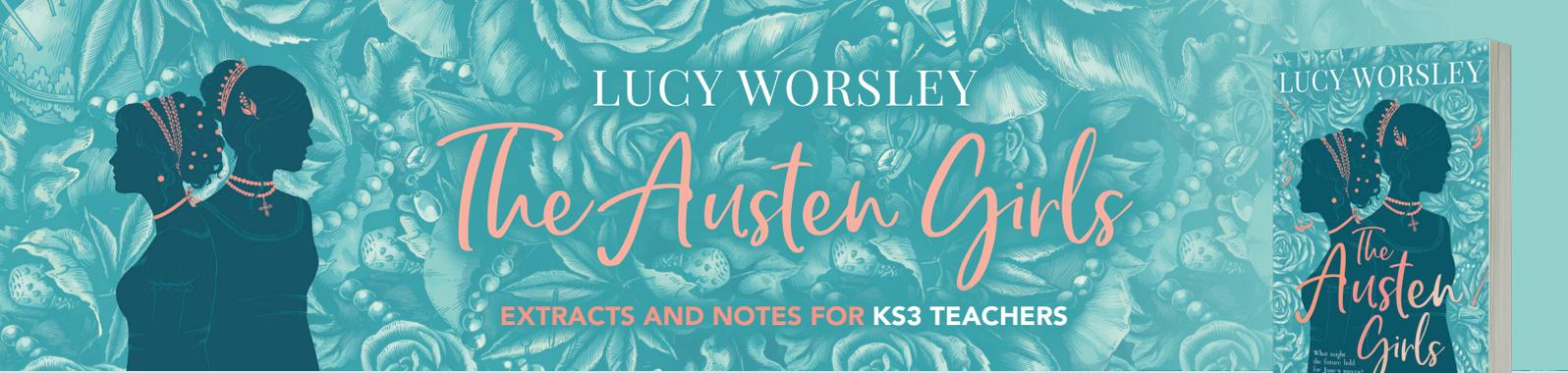
She couldn’t really imagine what would come next, or what it would be like to be married. Or even what the man doing the asking would look like. The proposal, that was enough. That was all she wanted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Why do you think the writer starts with this intimate conversation between Fanny and Anna? What do we learn about them?
- What is ‘the goal towards which Fanny’s life had been building’? How does Fanny feel about this?
- What were the expectations surrounding love and marriage for women during Jane Austen’s lifetime?
- Why would marriage have been essential for someone like Anna? How do she and Fanny differ in their circumstances?
- How do both Jane and Fanny challenge what society expects of them? In what ways do they still have to conform?

ACTIVITY: DEAR DIARY

- In pairs, take it in turns to role play the characters of Anna and Fanny discussing the following topics: Marriage; Love; Wealth; Family; and Society’s expectations. You will have one minute to talk about each topic; the challenge is to try and avoid repeating yourselves but to reveal as much as possible about the different circumstances and viewpoints of each character, as well as the time period they are growing up in.
- Use this role play, as well as ideas from the text, to help you to write two separate diary entries on the topics of love and marriage. The first diary entry should be from Anna, and the second from Fanny.
- Swap your work with your partner and read over each other’s diary entries. Reflect on how your partner has communicated the feelings and emotions of each character.
- Feedback as a class on how the world has or hasn’t changed in terms of expectations of love and marriage since Anna and Fanny’s lifetimes.

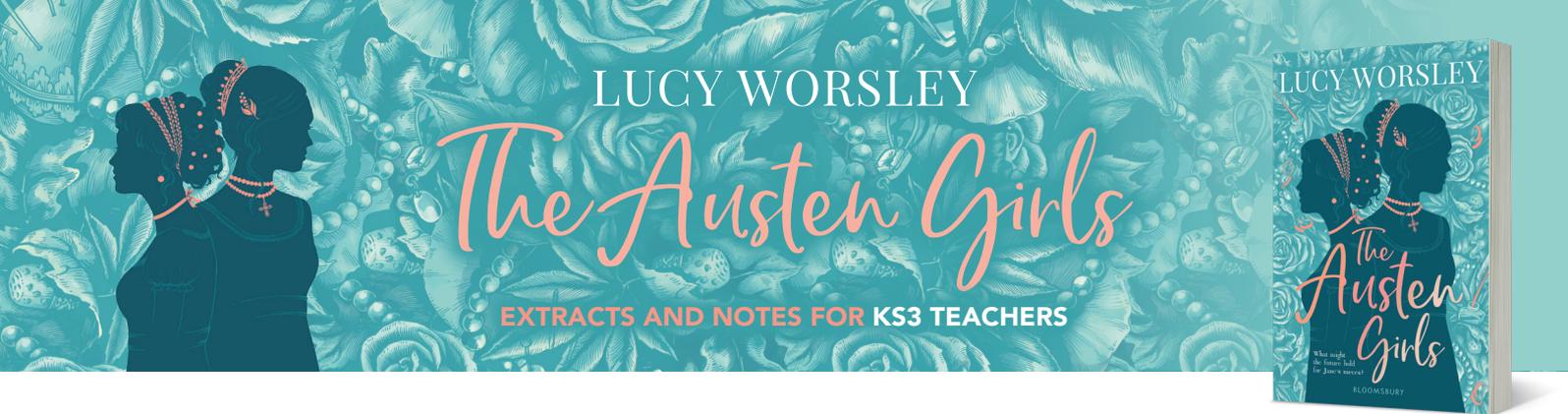


Dear Diary

Love Anna

Dear Diary

Love Fanny



EXTRACT 3: SCANDAL (Taken from Chapter 14 – The library, Godmersham Park)

‘But *what happened* to Mr Drummer? I hear he has been taken to prison!’

‘Yes, yes, he has,’ her father conceded, turning back to his papers with a shake of the head. ‘Stealing. In Canterbury. A bad, bad business. I had no idea that his means were so slender that he felt the need to steal ... items of clothing. Gloves, I believe it was.’

‘Papa!’ Fanny’s surprise made her voice a little shrill, and she swallowed hard in order to lower it. ‘Really?’ she began again. ‘I mean, it sounds so unlikely.’

‘Well, Mr Fortescue told me,’ her father said. ‘And he’s another magistrate, you know. Fine fellow. Couldn’t have got it wrong.’

‘And what did Mr Drummer say?’

‘Oh, well, I don’t know, I’ve been too busy to see him.’

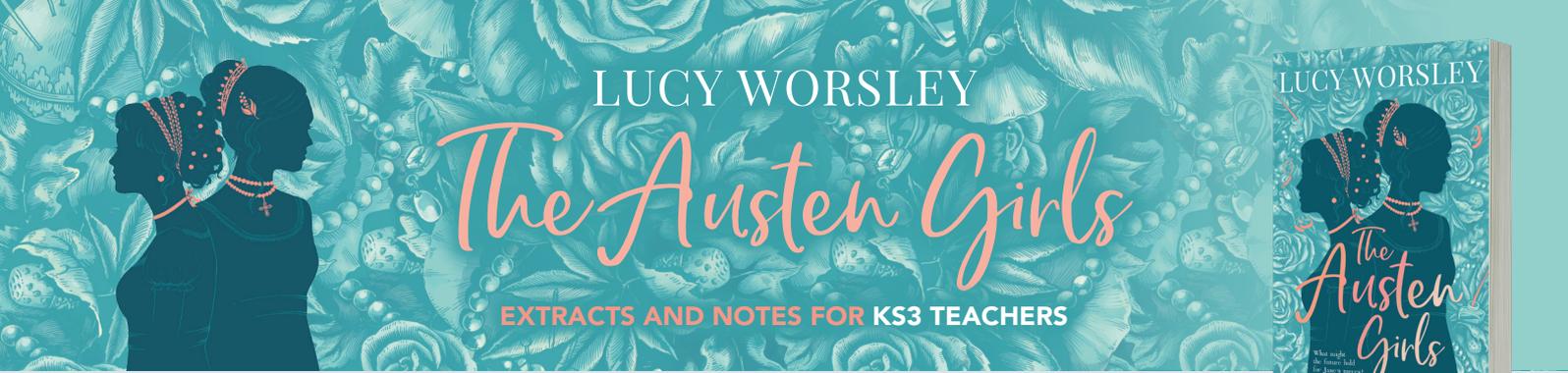
If he wasn’t such a jolly, hearty man, Fanny would have said that her father looked a little mortified. And now he was continuing with his explanation, almost as if he felt a need to justify his behaviour.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What is meant and implied by the term ‘scandal’? What scandal is Mr Drummer at the centre of?
- How does the justice system of Jane Austen’s lifetime differ to today’s? Explain your ideas.
- How do Aunt Jane and Fanny help Mr Drummer? Who lets him down?
- Why would Aunt Jane’s and Fanny’s involvement have seemed unladylike and even controversial?
- What other kinds of scandals or threats of scandals are mentioned in the text? Give examples.

ACTIVITY: READ ALL ABOUT IT!

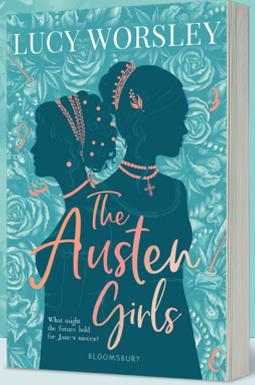
- Write an early 19th century newspaper article detailing Mr Drummer’s scandal. Remember that at this time the newspaper was a major source of information and gossip, so try to make your article as informative and persuasive as possible.
- Before you start writing your article, think about the position you are going to adopt and your coverage of the story. Here are some questions to help you plan:
 - How much of the scandal will you cover? i.e. just the initial arrest of Mr Drummer, or the whole story?
 - How biased or sensationalised will your story be? i.e. will it be fair and balanced or will it be very one-sided?
 - Will the content be mostly factual or will you include gossip and rumours?
 - Will you include any quotes? If so, who from?
 - How will you encourage the reader to buy the paper again tomorrow to follow the story?
 - How will your headline grab the reader’s attention and give a clear view of your position?
- Once you have finished planning, write up your ‘19th Century Newspaper Article’ using language and phrasing that makes it read as if it’s really from the 19th century. Put your articles on display in the classroom.



LUCY WORSLEY

The Austen Girls

EXTRACTS AND NOTES FOR KS3 TEACHERS



Today's Sponsors
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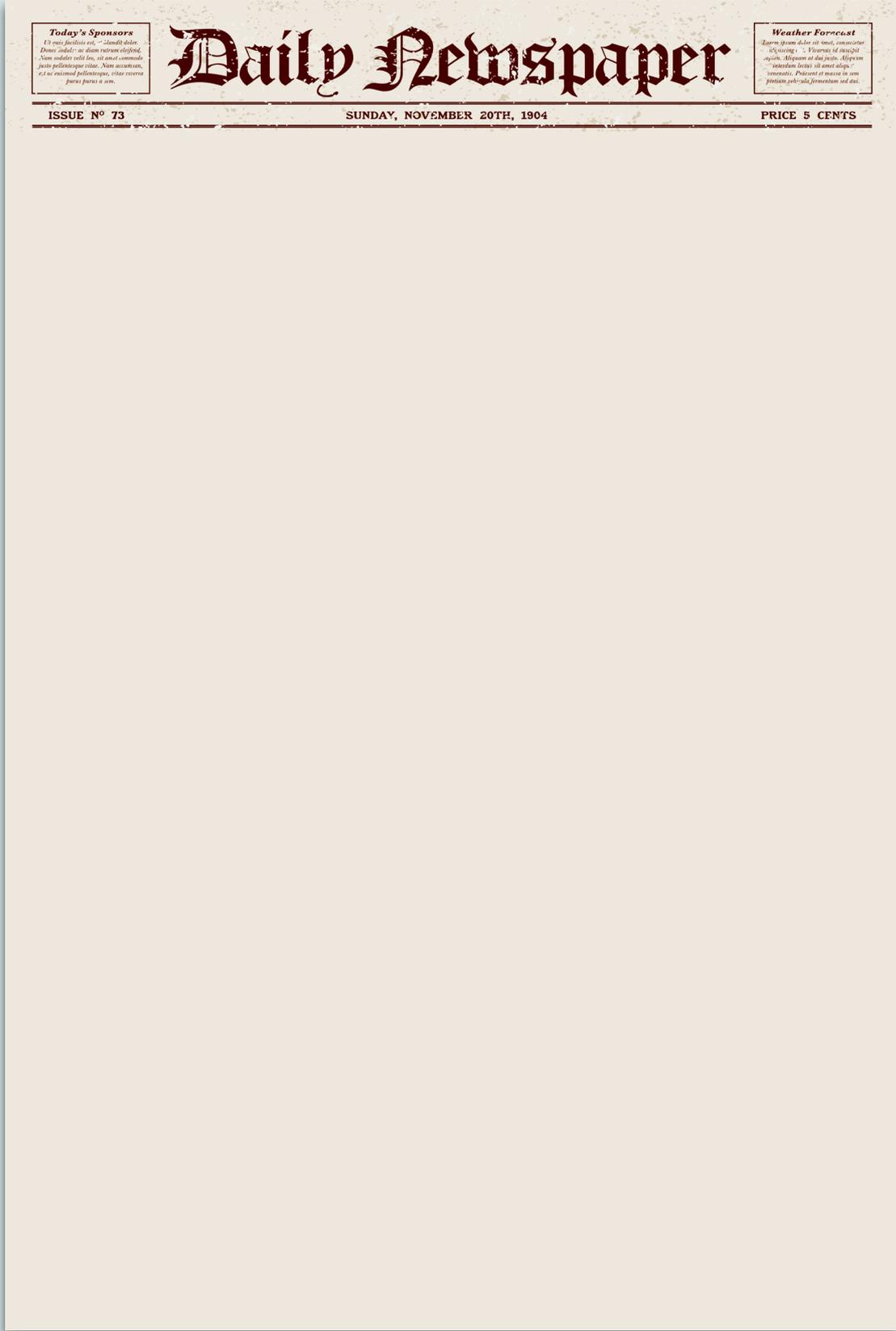
Daily Newspaper

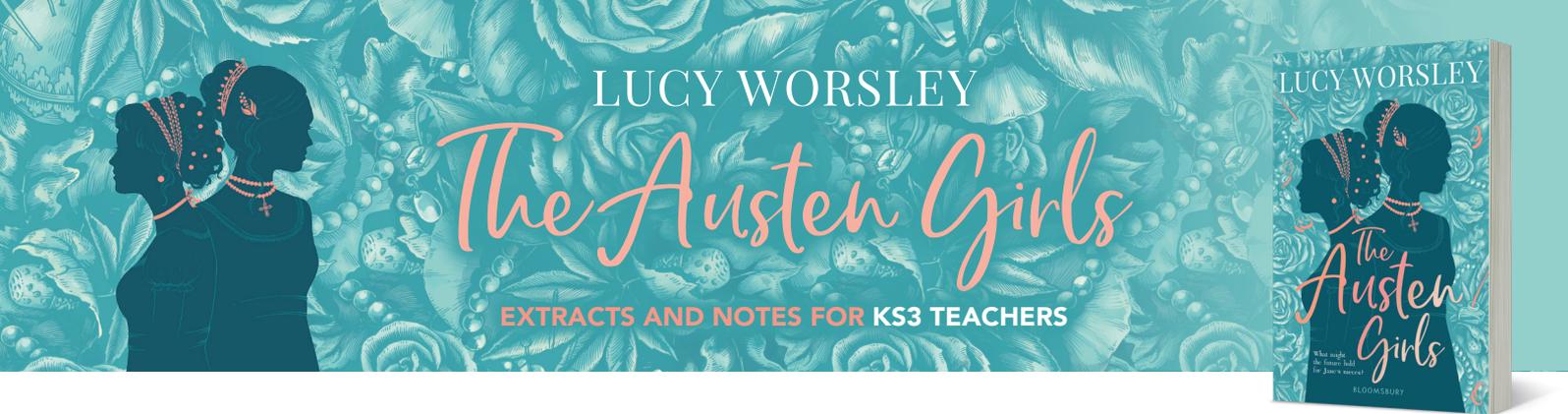
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SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20TH, 1904

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EXTRACT 4: HEROINES (Taken from Chapter 37 – The library, Godmersham Park)

Fanny found herself sitting down at her father's desk, and taking her father's pen, and picking it up, playing with it. She was playing, too, with the picture in her mind, of Anna's cross face, her beautiful hair, the passionate way she always spoke, even if she was saying the silliest, lightest thing in the world.

A heroine.

Fanny foraged for a fine, fresh piece of paper, and picked up the pen.

'Anna,' she wrote at the top, like the title of a story.

She underlined it.

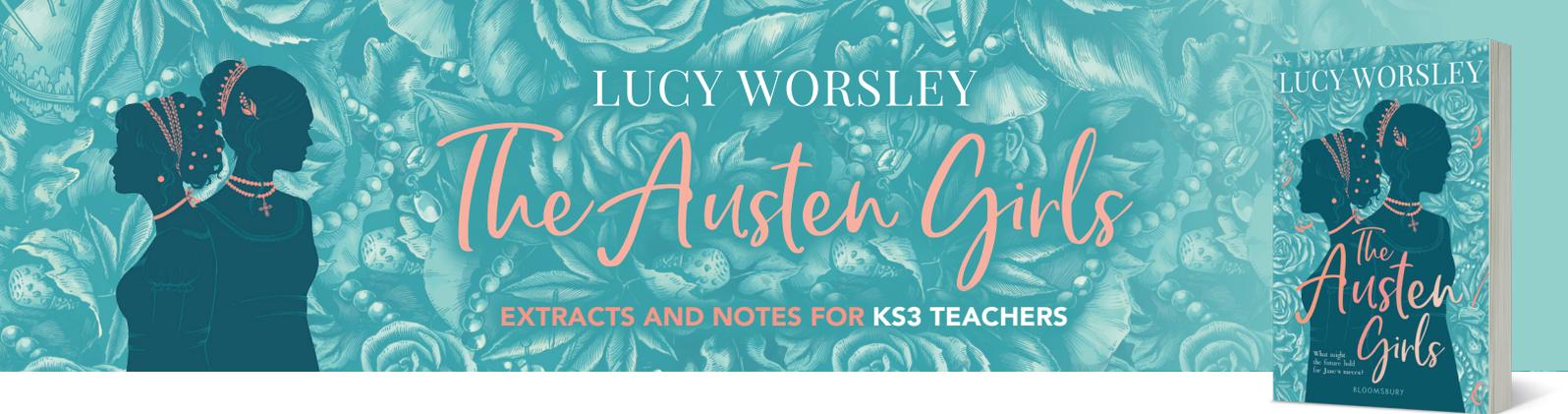
She felt like she was poised on the brink of something, like that moment before pushing off on skates for the first time in the winter when the pond froze.

And underneath the title she wrote, 'Miss Austen, Thief-Taker. A Novel of Adventure.'

And then she began.

'Miss Anna Austen, sixteen years of age, was assistant to the celebrated thief-taker, Mr ...'

Yes, if she wasn't going to go out, then at least Fanny would have a thief-taking adventure here at home, and Anna would be the heroine. It would be very pleasant to have a secret.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What is a 'heroine'? What sorts of qualities would you associate with a heroine? Give examples.
- Why does Fanny choose Anna to be the heroine of her story? Why does Fanny think it would be pleasant to 'have a secret'?
- What connections could you make between the story's ending and Jane Austen's life? Explain your ideas.
- Which tragic event has had a big impact on Fanny's future and why?
- What kind of woman do you think Fanny grew into? Discuss your ideas.

ACTIVITY: FEMALE WRITERS THROUGH HISTORY

- As a class, consider how female writers through history might also be considered 'heroines' of their own real-life stories.
- Discuss any female authors you admire or that you have studied so far. Reflect on the time periods in which they were writing, the challenges they faced, connections/differences they have with other writers and any other biographical details.
- Use computers, textbooks, previous notes and any other resources you have to research your chosen female writer. Try not to just pick the first woman that comes to mind! Research as much as you can about different writers before choosing one. Once you have chosen your writer, make bullet point notes about them on a cue card in preparation for a five-minute presentation you will give.
- When you have completed your research and filled in your cue card, take it in turns to give your presentations. Each student will receive one question from another class member after their presentation to enable you to demonstrate how much you've learned.
- For an extra challenge, borrow or buy a text by your chosen author and write a short book review afterwards. Take into consideration the period your chosen author was writing in and why this makes her achievements especially impressive!