

## ***Northanger Abbey* Discussion Questions**

1. What evidence is there that this was Austen's first novel? How does the structure, characterization, and complexity of plot compare with her later, mature novels?
2. *Northanger Abbey* parodies the gothic novel, an immensely popular genre at the time Austen wrote the first draft. At the same time, *Northanger Abbey* includes a spirited defense of the novel in general. Discuss Austen's viewpoint and critique of the form of writing she has chosen to pursue.
3. Discuss the ways in which Austen parodies gothic novels, including Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

### **Henry Tilney**

4. What do we like about Henry?
5. Why does Henry fall in love with Catherine? What does he see in her?
6. When Henry talks to Catherine about novels, muslins, and journal writing, is he trying to educate her?
  - Does he help her learn the merits of her own character?
  - Does he try to mold Catherine?
7. During the ride to Northanger Abbey when Henry teases Catherine about a mysterious chest, does he know that such a chest will be in Catherine's room?
8. Do you think that in the end Henry settles on Catherine because his father opposed her?
9. Henry says of Mrs. Allen: "What a picture of intellectual poverty!" Is this an accurate characterization? Why?
10. Compare Henry's speech to Austen's other male characters in *Northanger Abbey* and other novels: how much do we actually hear them say and in what manner do they talk?
11. Is Henry Tilney a younger version of Mr. Knightley?
12. It has been suggested that Henry Tilney and Captain Wentworth are Austen's most charming heroes. Compare Henry with Austen's other heroes, as well as her charmers—Willoughby, Wickham, Henry Crawford, and Frank Churchill.

### **Catherine Morland**

13. Describe Catherine.
14. How does she compare with Austen's other heroines?

15. Catherine is 17 years old at the beginning of the novel, the same age as Marianne Dashwood at the beginning of *Sense and Sensibility*. Compare the two in terms of emotional and intellectual development.
16. Why is Catherine deceived by Isabella?
17. Discuss how Catherine's viewpoint and impressions are shaped by her reading of gothic novels. How do they influence her view of General Tilney and his home?
18. How does Catherine grow from an unlikely heroine to a deserving young woman?
  - When does she realize Mrs. Allen's failure as a surrogate mother?
  - When does she begin to see John Thorpe's true nature?
  - When does she realize that she can't rely on advice from her Oxford-educated brother?
19. Is Catherine like *Emma's* Harriet Smith? How is she different?
20. Compare Catherine's parents to the heroine's parents in other Austen novels. How has Catherine's upbringing shaped her judgment?

### **General Tilney**

21. Describe the General.
22. What is his relationship with Henry and Eleanor? Is he a good father?
23. In what ways does he go about capturing Catherine as if pursuing a military campaign?
24. How does he represent British authority?
25. Contrast Isabella Thorpe and Eleanor Tilney as sisters and as women.
26. What role does Frederick Tilney's brief appearance play in the novel?
27. What do you think happens between Frederick and Isabella?
28. How could James Morland, who plans to be a clergyman, have considered marrying Isabella?
29. Discuss how Bath is represented in *Northanger Abbey* and how it is represented in *Persuasion*. How do you account for the difference?

**Bonus Question:** When and how did Mrs. Tilney die?  
(She died nine years ago, when Eleanor was 13, of "bilious fever.")