

RESOURCES

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DESCRIPTIONS OF GAMES

- charade:** “A kind of riddle in which each syllable of a word, or a complete word or phrase, is enigmatically described, or (now more usually) dramatically represented” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). In *Emma*, charades take the form of three-part riddles: “my first” (first syllable), “my second” (second syllable), and “my whole” (whole word).
- piquet:** “Two players are each dealt twelve cards from a pack with no 2s, 3s, 4s, 5s, or 6s, the remaining eight cards being available for exchange. The elder hand then enumerates the cards in his hands, first by ‘point’ (being the highest number of cards of one suit he holds and, if the other player has an equal number, ‘point’ going to the player with the highest value of pips in those cards), then by a flush of three or more (e.g., ‘tierce,’ ‘quart,’ ‘quint’), then how many 4s or 3s of a kind he has, his opponent each time responding ‘not good,’ ‘good,’ or ‘equal,’ corresponding to whether he can do better, worse, or the same. A number of tricks are played thus” (Pool 64).
- quadrille:** “It was a variation of ombre... played by four people with a deck from which the 8s, 9s, and 10s had been removed” (Pool 65).
- ombre:** “The ombre plays against the other two, each being dealt nine cards from a forty-card deck which has had the 8s, 9s, and 10s removed. The ombre gets to discard and also to designate the trump suit. The play is like whist” (Pool 64).
- whist:** “A game for two couples, the partners sitting opposite one another and each player being dealt thirteen cards. The first person puts down a card which the next person must match in suit if he can. Otherwise, he must play the trump suit or discard. The person who plays the highest trump or the highest card of the suit led wins the trick and leads for the next trick. Points are won according to the number of tricks played and, sometimes, the number of honors held, and a game is won by getting 5 or 10 points, depending on whether ‘short’ or ‘long’ whist is played. A ‘rubber’ usually consists of the best two out of three games. Whist is the ancestor of bridge” (Pool 65).

KITTY, A FAIR BUT FROZEN MAID

A riddle by David Garrick, half-remembered by Mr. Woodhouse

Kitty, a fair, but frozen maid,
 Kindled a flame I still deplore;
 The hood-wink’ d* boy I call’ d in aid,
 Much of his near approach afraid,
 So fatal to my suit before.

At length, propitious to my pray’r,
 The little urchin came;
 At once he sought the midway air,
 And soon he clear’ d, with dextrous care,
 The bitter relicks of my flame.

To Kitty, Fanny now succeeds,
 She kindles slow, but lasting fires:
 With care my appetite she feeds;

Each day some willing victim bleeds,
 To satisfy my strange desires.
 Say, by what title, or what name,
 Must I this youth address?
 Cupid and he are not the same,
 Tho' both can raise, or quench a flame —
 I'll kiss you, if you guess.

* *hood-wink'd*: literally or figuratively blindfolded/blinded

Spoilers: Originally-published answer—"a chimney sweep."

PASSAGES & DISCUSSION

General Discussion: Patricia Meyer Spacks has observed that Emma is bored, but that the novel "distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable responses to" boredom (Spacks 172). On which occasions are card games or word games presented as legitimate or appropriate, and on which occasions are they presented as illegitimate or inappropriate?

— Word Games and Riddles —

Harriet collects riddles, Mr. Elton suggests a well-known charade

Emma, from volume I, chapter 9 (pp. 67-68)

From Her views of improving her little friend's mind... *to* ...they had transcribed it some pages ago already.

Discussion

- If riddle-collecting is Harriet's "only" intellectual pursuit because Emma does not persevere in improving Harriet's mind, what is the narrator implying about the wit of riddles and the limitations of that wit? What might the limitations of wit imply about characters who (unlike Harriet) are skilled at witty wordplay?
- *Spoilers*: The answer to the "well-known" charade is *first syllable* woe, *second syllable* man, *whole word* woman. What kind of relationship between men and women does this riddle imply? (How does that notion compare to Mr. Elton's later relationship with his wife, or Emma's later relationship with Mr. Knightley?) What does it say about Mr. Elton and how he wants to be perceived that he offers this charade to Emma and Harriet?
- What does it say about Mr. Woodhouse that he fixates on an old riddle that sounds erotic but turns out to be about the comforts of home? (see "Kitty, a Fair but Frozen Maid," above)

Mr. Elton's charade

Emma, from volume I, chapter 9 (pp. 69-70)

From "Why will not you write one yourself for us, Mr. Elton?" *to* "Approve my charade and my intentions in the same glance."

Discussion

- How does Emma both understand and misunderstand Mr. Elton's charade? What does this say about her as a character? What does it foreshadow about her wordplay with Frank Churchill?

Mr. Elton metaphorically threw die by writing charade, offers to play cards with Mr. Woodhouse

Emma, from volume I, chapter 9 (p. 79)

From Later in the morning... the hero of this inimitable charade... *to* He re-urged—she re-declined...

Discussion

- What does it mean that Mr. Elton has "thrown a die" by offering his romantically-hinting charade? What does the metaphor of a (dice) game say about Emma's request for the charade and Mr. Elton's composition of it? What does losing the game (or the gamble) look like for Mr. Elton?
- If Mr. Elton's offer to play cards with Mr. Woodhouse serves as an occasion for assessing the effect of his romantic overtures, what does that imply about the social uses of card-playing? Is his offer a genuine offer, and if not, what does it say about his character?

Word puzzles are part of Frank Churchill's deeper game**Emma, from volume III, chapter 5 (pp. 325-326)***From* "Miss Woodhouse... have your nephews taken away their alphabets?" *to* ...deeper game on Frank Churchill's part.**Discussion**

- What is the significance of Frank Churchill and Emma engaging in "child's play" with an educational toy for children? Is the apparent childlike innocence of the game a deceptive mask? Is their behavior childish? Is this a commentary on their use of their education—wit as compared to wisdom?
- If this game is part of Frank Churchill "deeper game"—what Mr. Knightley later calls a "dangerous game"—what is he playing that larger game for?

Word games at Box Hill: clever and dull things, a flattering conundrum, and a displeasing acrostic**Emma, from volume III, chapter 7 (pp. 347-348)***From* "Ladies and gentlemen... Miss Woodhouse... requires something very entertaining..." *to* "An abominable puppy!"**Discussion**

- How do Emma and Frank Churchill "reckon" the wit and entertainment value of people's words (Mr. Weston, Miss Bates)?
- When Mrs. Elton dismisses the value of the "acrostic... upon my own name," is she really boasting about it? Is the acrostic—like Mr. Weston's conundrum and Mr. Elton's earlier flattering charade for Emma—simultaneously a marker of the witty man's value and the complimented woman's value?
- What is the relationship between flattery, wit, and amusement?
- What is it (more than one thing?) that Mr. Knightley disapproves of in this word game?

— Card Games and Backgammon —**Discussion (questions for all passages concerning card games and backgammon)**

- What makes a game serve as an alternative to active, social, romantic, etc. pursuits, and what makes a game serve those pursuits? When are characters simply bored and willing to take up any occupation (game, conversation, dance) for amusement?
- Are different forms of amusement associated with different stages of life, or different personalities?
- How do games that require a set number of players shape social situations (too few or too many people for the game)?

Either a visitor or backgammon can get Mr. Woodhouse through the evening**Emma, from volume I, chapter 1**

Emma spared no exertions to maintain this happier flow of ideas, and hoped, by the help of backgammon, to get her father tolerably through the evening, and be attacked by no regrets but her own. The backgammon-table was placed; but a visitor [Mr. Knightley] immediately afterwards walked in and made it unnecessary.

Mr. Woodhouse's frequent card-playing part of his own way of being fond of society**Emma, from volume I, chapter 3**

Mr. Woodhouse was fond of society in his own way. He liked very much to have his friends come and see him... his horror of late hours, and large dinner-parties, made him unfit for any acquaintance but such as would visit him on his own terms. ...Not unfrequently, through Emma's persuasion, he had some of the chosen and the best to dine with him: but evening parties were what he preferred; and, unless he fancied himself at any time unequal to company, there was scarcely an evening in the week in which Emma could not make up a card-table for him.

Mrs. Bates plays quadrille (four players)**Emma, from volume I, chapter 3**

Mrs. Bates, the widow of a former vicar of Highbury, was a very old lady, almost past every thing but tea and quadrille.

Harriet and Mr. Martin play cards

Emma, from volume I, chapter 4

Harriet was very ready to speak of the share [Mr. Martin] had had in their moonlight walks and merry evening games... “sometimes of an evening, before we went to cards, he would read something aloud out of the *Elegant Extracts*, very entertaining.”

Mr. E good at whist (four players) but foregoes it when framing Emma’s drawing of Harriet

Emma, from volume I, chapter 8

Mr. Perry... had met Mr. Elton, and found to his great surprize, that Mr. Elton was actually on his road to London, and not meaning to return till the morrow, though it was the whist-club night, which he had been never known to miss before; and Mr. Perry had remonstrated with him about it, and told him how shabby it was in him, their best player, to absent himself, and tried very much to persuade him to put off his journey only one day; but it would not do; Mr. Elton had been determined to go on, and had said in a very particular way indeed, that he was going on business which he would not put off for any inducement in the world; and something about a very enviable commission, and being the bearer of something exceedingly precious. Mr. Perry could not quite understand him, but he was very sure there must be a lady in the case, and he told him so; and Mr. Elton only looked very conscious and smiling, and rode off in great spirits.

Mr. Woodhouse chooses talking with Isabella over playing cards

Emma, from volume I, chapter 12

The evening was quiet and conversable, as Mr. Woodhouse declined cards entirely for the sake of comfortable talk with his dear Isabella...

Mr. Woodhouse plays piquet (two players) with Mrs. Goddard

Emma, from volume II, chapter 7

[Emma to Mr. Woodhouse:] “I am not afraid of your not being exceedingly comfortable with Mrs. Goddard. She loves piquet, you know...”

Mrs. Elton plans a card party

Emma, from volume II, chapter 16

No invitation came amiss to her. Her Bath habits made evening-parties perfectly natural to her, and Maple Grove had given her a taste for dinners. She was a little shocked at the want of two drawing rooms, at the poor attempt at rout-cakes, and there being no ice in the Highbury card-parties. Mrs. Bates, Mrs. Perry, Mrs. Goddard and others, were a good deal behind-hand in knowledge of the world, but she would soon shew them how every thing ought to be arranged. In the course of the spring she must return their civilities by one very superior party—in which her card-tables should be set out with their separate candles and unbroken packs in the true style—and more waiters engaged for the evening than their own establishment could furnish, to carry round the refreshments at exactly the proper hour, and in the proper order.

Four play cards, and five talk

Emma, from volume II, chapter 18

After tea, Mr. and Mrs. Weston, and Mr. Elton sat down with Mr. Woodhouse to cards. The remaining five were left to their own powers, and Emma doubted their getting on very well; for Mr. Knightley seemed little disposed for conversation; Mrs. Elton was wanting notice, which nobody had inclination to pay, and she was herself in a worry of spirits which would have made her prefer being silent.

Whist for standers-by who are not dancing, Mr. Knightley too young-looking not to dance

Emma, from volume III, chapter 2

Emma... was more disturbed by Mr. Knightley’s not dancing than by any thing else.—There he was, among the standers-by, where he ought not to be; he ought to be dancing,—not classing himself with the husbands, and fathers, and whist-players, who were pretending to feel an interest in the dance till their rubbers were made up,—so young as he looked!

Mr. Woodhouse plays backgammon with Mrs. Bates

Emma, from volume III, chapter 2

Miss Bates might be heard... “Grandmama was quite well, had a charming evening with Mr. Woodhouse, a vast deal of chat, and backgammon.”