

**A Timeline of Events from *Emma*, *Jane Eyre*,  
*Great Expectations*, and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*  
(through roughly the first third of the novels)**

**1799**

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* begins in November of 1799. Jane is approximately 10 years old.

**1800**

Jane arrives in Lowood in January of 1800. Helen Burns dies in June of the same year.

**1805**

In *Emma*, this is approximately the date of Emma's mother's death, as Mr. Knightly observes that Emma has been mistress of the house since she was 12.

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane becomes a teacher in Lowood in this year at approximately age 16. Miss Temple would have been about this age or a little older when Jane knew her in 1800.

**1806**

In *Emma*, this is the year that Isabella Woodhouse marries John Knightley.

**1807**

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane travels to Thornfield for the first time in October of this year. She is 18 years old.

**1808**

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane meets Edward Rochester for the first time in January. He is twenty years older than her, so approximately 38.

**1810**

Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* begins on Christmas Eve in approximately 1810. Pip is seven at the beginning of the novel. Mrs. Joe is about twenty years older than him. Joe is approximately the same age. The convict is about forty-five when Pip encounters him.

**1811**

In *Emma*, Mr. Elton enters the neighborhood in December of this year.

**1813**

Jane Austen's *Emma* takes place over about a year from 1813 to 1814. Emma is 21 when the novel opens. Jane Fairfax is the same age. Frank Churchill is approximately the same age as both or slightly older. A line from the novel implies that Isabella is seven years older than Emma. Harriet is 17. Robert Martin is 24. George Knightly is 37. Mr. Woodhouse is over 60. The

Taylor-Weston marriage referred to in the opening of the novel had taken place in late September or early October. Mr. Martin proposes to Harriet in December, and Mr. Elton proposes to Emma on December 25 and leaves for Bath on December 28.

**1814**

In *Emma*, Jane Fairfax arrives in late January or early February, not having visited since January 1812; she receives the pianoforte on Valentine's Day. Mr. Elton returns to Highbury in early March.

**1817**

In *Great Expectations*, Pip would be approximately 14 when Miss Havisham pays for Pip to be Joe's apprentice. Miss Havisham is approximately 40 when Pip first meets her. Biddy and Estella are approximately the same age as Pip.

**1821**

In *Great Expectations*, Pip is 18 when Jaggers takes him to London. Herbert is approximately the same age as Pip. Jaggers would be in his late 30s or early 40s, and Wemmick would be a few years younger than him.

## 1873

The Great Depression (sometimes called the Long Depression, to distinguish it from the worldwide depression of the 1930s) begins in Great Britain. The depression was caused by the dramatic fall in grain prices following the opening up of the American prairies to cultivation in the 1870s and the advent of cheap transportation with the rise of steamships. It will last until 1896, though prices will not truly recover until after WWII. This is the most important historical context for *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (though the novel actually begins in 1884).

## 1881

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Angel Clare surrenders the prospect of Cambridge during this year (at age 20).

## 1884

Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* begins on May 30, 1884 when John Durbeyfield learns that he is "Sir John." Tess is 16 when the novel begins; Liza-Lu is 13; Angel Clare is 23; and Alec d'Urberville is 24. Tess takes a position at the d'Urberville farm on June 1, and flees after her rape on September 27.

## 1885

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Sorrow is born in June and dies in August.

## 1887

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Tess arrives at Talbothays Dairy in May. She is now 19 and Angel is 26.