Dr. Tomlinson

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Dr. Tomlinson teaches an early 19th-century British literature course at a public university in the Pacific Northwest. The course reading schedule includes several novels by Jane Austen, one of which is *Pride and Prejudice*. Dr. Tomlinson opens the first discussion session on this novel by asking, "So, what do you think of *Pride and Prejudice*?" After what seems like a long period of silence, Cheryl raises her hand and says, "To be honest, if I read another description of a ball gown I'm going to go crazy!" Some students in the class appear to be surprised by Cheryl's remark.

Dr. Tomlinson can tell that Cheryl is annoyed with the novel, but he's not exactly sure why. However, having taught Austen before, he has noticed that students' dislike for Austen's novels stems partially from not finding the novels relevant to their lives and experiences. So he says to Cheryl, "Well, think of it this way. When you and your friends were preparing for your Junior-Senior prom in high school, weren't you at all interested in what everybody was planning to wear?" Cheryl was quiet for a moment and then answered, "If you knew where I went to high school, you wouldn't be asking me that question." Dr. Tomlinson wasn't sure how to respond to this comment, so he decided to take another approach, which proved only marginally more successful.

As it turned out, Cheryl finished the course and performed well enough, but Dr. Tomlinson later learned that Cheryl had dropped out of college the next semester and joined the Army.

Questions about Dr. Tomlinson's Case

1) How might Dr. Tomlinson more effectively engaged Cheryl and other students in a discussion of *Pride and Prejudice?*

2) What do you make of Cheryl's comment that Dr. Tomlinson would not be asking about her prom experience had he know where she went to school?

3) What can Dr. Tomlinson do in future offerings of the course to meet the needs of students from varying class backgrounds?