What's Austen really saying?
Or unpicking the subtle nuances ...

To be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love; and very lively hopes of Mr Bingley's heart were entertained.

- What is not being said here? What is the sub-text?
- Is being fond of dancing 'a certain step towards falling in love'?
- Austen uses irony when she says a certain step. This is what the girls hope.

...and their indifference towards Jane when not immediately before them restored Elizabeth to the enjoyment of all her original dislike.

- What does Austen drop in here as a passing comment? What do we realise about Elizabeth?
- Austen drops in an idea: that Elizabeth wants to dislike and in fact enjoys disliking the Bingley sisters. It creates tongue-in-cheek humour because the reader shares the view, thus allowing them to identify with Elizabeth.

She [Mrs Bennet] concluded with many good wishes that Lady Lucas might soon be equally fortunate, though evidently and triumphantly believing there was no chance of it.

- Austen uses bathos here: she contrasts Mrs Bennet's words with her thoughts. 'Evidently' and 'triumphantly' suggest Mrs Bennet breaks the rules of social politeness and though incapable of embarrassing herself, brings embarrassment to those around her.

Their [Kitty and Lydia's] eyes were immediately wandering up in the street in quest of the officers, and nothing less than a very smart bonnet indeed or a really new muslin in a shop window, could recall them.

- Austen uses irony to suggest what?
- Austen implies that the girls are equally interested in fashion and officers - nothing less is used ironically. The girls are frivolous.

The evening conversation, when they were all assembled, had lost much of its animation, and almost all its sense, by the absence of Jane and Elizabeth.

- What does Austen drop in here? What is the purpose of the commas? What comment is being made about the other female Bennets?
- In parentheses (the commas), Austen drops in the idea that only Jane and Elizabeth are the only girls to talk with sense/intelligence and vitality.