

## Teacher's notes

## Jane Eyre

by Charlotte Brontë



## SUMMARY

**T**his powerful, groundbreaking novel was instantly successful on its publication in 1847.

At the beginning of the book, Jane Eyre is a poor, ten-year-old orphan living with her uncaring aunt and bullying cousins. Her aunt sends her to a school which is so terrible that a serious illness kills many of the girls. After this the school regime becomes kinder and Jane remains there until, at eighteen, she finds a post as governess to a child. Her employer, Mr Rochester, is the child's guardian. He is a serious man who is not conventionally handsome. He and Jane become friendly, and he treats her as an equal. But strange events occur. Someone sets fire to Mr Rochester's bed while he is sleeping. A young man, Mr Mason, comes to visit Mr Rochester and is violently attacked.

Then, to Jane's astonishment, Rochester proposes to her. She accepts, being deeply in love with him. But just as the couple are about to exchange wedding vows, it is revealed that Mr Rochester is already married. What is the mystery of Rochester's wife? Jane loves Rochester, but how can she remain with him now? Jane flees, intending never to see Rochester again. But destiny eventually intervenes, and in a strange, half-happy, half-melancholy ending, the two are re-united.

## ABOUT CHARLOTTE BRONTË

Charlotte Brontë comes from one of the most famous families in British literary history. Born in 1816, Charlotte Brontë was the third child of a Protestant clergyman. She was one of six children, five girls and a boy. Charlotte's mother died when she was five, and the children were brought up by their father and an aunt in a lonely parsonage on the wild Yorkshire moors.

Charlotte's two elder sisters died when she was nine, leaving Charlotte with a younger brother, Branwell, and two younger sisters, Emily and Anne. The children attended school, but their real education was at home, where they read their father's many books and listened to the wonderful folk tales of the family servant.

The four children started writing fiction and poetry as teenagers. In 1846, the poetry of the three girls was published under pseudonyms. Charlotte's pseudonym

was 'Currer Bell'. By this time, the three young women were each writing novels. Emily and Anne had their novels accepted for publication, but Charlotte's novel, *The Professor*, was rejected. She immediately started on a second novel, and the book, *Jane Eyre*, was published to instant success in 1847, still under her pseudonym.

Tragedy now struck the family. In 1848, both Branwell and Emily died, and Anne died the following spring. Despite these losses, Charlotte published a third novel, *Shirley*, in 1849, and a fourth, *Villette*, in 1853. In 1854, Charlotte married her father's curate, but died ten months later, probably of an illness associated with pregnancy.

## BACKGROUND AND THEMES

During her lifetime, Charlotte Brontë was regarded as the best writer among the Brontë sisters. *Jane Eyre* was considered to be a story told with wonderful clarity and immediacy. There were many, however, who did not think it suitable reading for young ladies (although young ladies loved it!). The moralists were quite right about this, because, although there is no unacceptable sexual behaviour in the book, there is a steady building of sexual tension in the relationship between Jane Eyre and Mr Rochester.

Both Rochester and Jane are extraordinarily lifelike characters. Jane is quiet and simple, but she is also fiercely intelligent and direct. Rochester, some seventeen years older than Jane, is similarly intelligent and direct. Despite the barriers of class and position, the two meet as intellectual and emotional equals. Their conversations together have a quality of excitement that has almost no parallel in English literature.

Rochester is Jane's employer, her 'master'. For a long time he holds the power in their relationship. Then the tables are turned. At the end of the story, Jane becomes the powerful one, due to Rochester's physical frailty.

Feminists claimed that Jane Eyre was an early feminist, and with good reason. Here is a heroine who is not beautiful or even physically attractive. Jane is short and plain, not worth a second glance. Yet Rochester falls deeply in love with her as a person - this is the feminist dream! Moreover, Jane is fiercely independent,

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determined to make her way in life and remain true to her own principles.

Rochester, also, is not a conventional hero, his face being grim and rather frightening. But he is of a type - the extra-masculine hero who nonetheless is tender and passionate when in love. At the end of the story, however, Rochester - through his own heroism - loses a hand and much of his sight. Now Jane becomes the strong one. Twentieth-century literary critics have suggested that the author may have had an unconscious desire to make Rochester's masculine energy less threatening to female independence.

*Jane Eyre* is a splendid novel. The melodramatic events are accompanied by sharp observation and a narrative skill which make the story believable. The Brontë sisters had a love of high drama and what some have termed 'emotionalism'. Emily Brontë's equally well-known *Wuthering Heights* has the same quality of passion, and the same type of hero, but there is a savagery in her novel that is not present in *Jane Eyre*.

What were the influences that caused Charlotte Brontë to write this great novel? Biographers have stressed the family's relative isolation, the children's closeness to wild and lonely countryside, and their access to their father's large library. The children's religious aunt terrified the children with threats of 'the fires of hell' if they were not good. The family servant told them local folktales and superstitions. All this fed Charlotte's imagination. But life quickly taught her hard lessons. She lost her mother at the age of five. The terrible school in *Jane Eyre* is based on the school that Charlotte and her sisters attended as children. However, like all great creative artists, Charlotte Brontë used the negative aspects of her childhood to fuel her artistic achievement, and the result was *Jane Eyre*.

## Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the reader, and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book, see the photocopyable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of discussion and pair/groupwork questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

## ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

- Put students into pairs. Ask them to write a short description of the cover of the book.
- Write facts about Charlotte Brontë taken from the Introduction in the book. Write each fact on a different piece of paper. Give a piece of paper to every student in the class. Students then have ten minutes to get as much information as possible about Charlotte Brontë by questioning other students about their facts (they are not allowed to write anything down). Then, as a

whole-class activity, ask students what they have learned about the author.

## ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

## Pages 1-13

Put students into pairs. Ask them to choose 30 words that tell the story of this section. These must be separate words, not sentences. Then as a whole-class activity, elicit these words from students and write them onto the board. There should be more than 30 words at this point. From these words the class must agree on the thirty most important words.

## Pages 14-25

Put students into pairs. Ask them to role-play the following conversations:

- Imagine that Jane and Bertha Mason have a conversation when Bertha comes into the room and tears her dress. Make the conversation.
- Imagine that Jane and Mr Rochester have a conversation after Jane learns the truth about his marriage. Make the conversation.

## Pages 26-37

- Put students into small groups. Ask them to look up *realistic* in their dictionaries. Then ask them to discuss: Is *Jane Eyre* a realistic book? Which parts are realistic? Are any parts not realistic? Then have a whole-class discussion on the subject.
- Put students into pairs. Ask them to discuss: Do you think *Jane Eyre* was an unusual person for the time when she lived? Why/Why not?

## ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

Put students into small groups. Ask them to put the story into chapters and give each chapter a title. Ask them to explain their reasons for their chapters and also their reasons for the titles. Then as a whole class activity, elicit chapters and titles from the groups. Write the information on the board. The class must then agree about chapters and titles.

## Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the 'Before You Read' sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

## Pages 1-13

**attic** (n) a room at the top of a house, inside the roof  
**cruel** (adj) liking to hurt other people  
**pack** (v) to put clothes into a suitcase  
**servant** (n) somebody who works for someone in their house

## Pages 14-25

**clergyman** (n) a man who works for the church  
**mad** (adj) ill in the mind; crazy

## Pages 26-37

**blind** (adj) not able to see  
**lawyer** (n) somebody who works with the law and helps people with it



## Student's activities

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Students can do these exercises alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.

### Activities before reading the book

- Read the first eleven lines of the Introduction in your book. Then answer these questions.
  - Who does Jane see in her room?
  - Who does Jane Eyre work for? Describe this person.
  - Who does Jane teach?
  - Who does Jane love?
  - What do you think Rochester's terrible secret could be?
- There is a picture in the book of the woman with the 'cruel and frightening face'. Find this picture. What do you think she is doing, and why?

### Activities while reading the book

#### PAGES 1-13

##### Page 1 to the middle of page 7

- Put the two parts of the sentences together.
  - When the story begins, Jane
  - Jane lives with
  - Jane's cousin, John, throws
  - Jane is locked in a cold dark room and
  - Mrs Reed decides to
  - becomes ill.
  - her aunt and cousins.
  - send Jane away to school.
  - a heavy book at Jane and hurts her.
  - is ten years old.
- Complete these sentences.
  - There are about eighty girls at ..... School.
  - There is very little ..... for the girls and they are always hungry.
  - The school ..... a man called Mr Brocklehurst.
  - After a few months, many of the girls become seriously .....
  - Jane's ....., Helen Burn, dies.
  - Mr Brocklehurst ..... the school and it becomes a happier place.
  - Jane stays at the school until she is .....

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- Then she finds a job as a ..... to a little girl.
- Work in groups of three.
 

*Student A:* You are Jane. You live with the Reeds. Tell the other students about your life there.

*Student B:* You are Jane. You have been at Lowood School for a few months. Tell the other students about your life there.

*Student C:* You are Jane. You are eighteen. You are going to work at Thornfield Hall as a teacher. Tell the other students about your hopes for your life.

After this, decide who is the unhappiest of the three 'Janes'.

#### Middle of page 7 to page 13

- Are these sentences right or wrong?
  - Mrs Fairfax works for Adele.
  - Mr Rochester wants Jane to teach Adele French.
  - One day a stranger's dog falls down on the ice.
  - Jane thinks the stranger is handsome with an interesting face.
  - The stranger is Mr Mason, the owner of Thornfield Hall.
  - Jane enjoys talking to Mr Rochester.
  - One night, Jane finds that Mr Rochester's bed is on fire.
- Answer these questions.
  - Who lives in the attic?
  - What is she like?
  - Who is Mr Mason?
- Talk to another student.
  - Who do you think set fire to Mr Rochester's bed?
  - Why did they do this?
- Imagine you are Jane. Write a letter to a friend about your life at Thornfield Hall.

#### PAGES 14-25

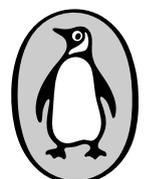
##### Page 14 to the middle of page 21

- Put these sentences (a) - (h) in the order of the story.
  - Someone attacks Mr Mason.
  - Mrs Reed dies.
  - Mr Rochester asks Jane to marry him.
  - Mr Mason leaves Thornfield Hall.
  - Jane returns to Thornfield Hall.

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- (f) Mr Rochester and Mr Mason talk for a long time.  
 (g) Mrs Reed tells Jane about the letter from her uncle.  
 (h) Jane visits Mrs Reed.
- 2 Work with another student. Discuss these questions.
- (a) Why doesn't Mrs Reed tell Jane about the letter from her uncle when she gets it?  
 (b) Why does 'Grace Poole' attack Mr Mason, do you think?  
 (c) Why does Jane return to Thornfield Hall after she reads the letter from her uncle, do you think?  
 (d) Do you think she is right to return?  
 (e) Why doesn't Mr Rochester tell Jane immediately that he wants to marry her? Why does he first make her think that he is marrying Blanche Ingram? Do you think he is right to do this?

## Middle of page 21 to the end of page 25

- 1 Who says or thinks these things? When?
- (a) 'Is she going to kill me?'  
 (b) 'Jane, I think you had a bad dream.'  
 (c) 'Slowly, she became mad and dangerous.'  
 (d) 'I must leave my home forever.'  
 (e) 'You can't stay here.'
- 2 Work with another student. Discuss these questions.
- (a) Do you think Mr Mason is right to stop the marriage?  
 (b) Do you think Jane is right to leave Thornfield Hall? Do you think she is right to leave and not to say goodbye to Mr Rochester?  
 (c) Why do you think Jane leaves Thornfield Hall with only a little money?  
 (d) What do you think will happen next?

## PAGES 26-37

## Page 26 to the middle of page 32

- 1 Complete these sentences.
- (a) The Rivers family help Jane because . . .  
 (b) Jane gives them a different name for herself because . . .  
 (c) St John Rivers gives Jane a job because . . .  
 (d) St John Rivers finds out Jane's real story because . . .  
 (e) Jane becomes rich because . . .  
 (f) Jane gives a lot of her money to the Rivers family because . . .  
 (g) St John Rivers asks Jane to marry him because . . .

- 2 Work with another student. Discuss these questions.
- (a) How does Jane feel about St John? Do you think she will marry him? Give reasons for your opinion.  
 (b) Jane hears Mr Rochester's voice in a dream. Do you think this can really happen? Give reasons for your opinion.
- 3 Work in pairs. Act the conversation between Jane and St John Rivers when he tells her that he wants to marry her.

## Middle of page 32 to page 37

- 1 Choose the right answer.
- (a) When Jane returns to Thornfield Hall  
 (i) it has no roof.  
 (ii) it is completely gone.
- (b) People think that  
 (i) Mr Rochester burned the house down.  
 (ii) Mr Rochester's wife burned the house down.
- (c) Mr Rochester tried to save his wife but  
 (i) she fell from the roof and died.  
 (ii) she killed herself with a knife.
- (d) When Mr Rochester came out of the house  
 (i) he had lost both hands.  
 (ii) he was blind and had lost a hand.
- (e) Jane goes to see Mr Rochester and  
 (i) they marry three days later.  
 (ii) they marry two years later.
- (f) Two years after they marry  
 (i) Mr Rochester begins to see again with one eye.  
 (ii) can see again with both eyes.

- 2 Work in pairs.

*Student A:* You are Mr Rochester. Talk to a friend about the fire that killed your wife and hurt you badly. Talk about Jane and your marriage.

*Student B:* You are a friend of Mr Rochester. Ask him questions about the fire and his marriage to Jane.

## Activities after reading the book

Talk to another student.

*Jane Eyre* ends with these words:

'Our story was a strange and sad one, and terrible things happened to us, but now at last we are happy together.'

- (a) Why was the story of Jane and Mr Rochester a strange and sad one?  
 (b) What terrible things happened to them?

