

CHARLOTTE BRONTË

JANE EYRE

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# Contents

About the Author	6
About the Book	7
<b>FACT FILE</b> What's so special about Jane?	8
Characters	12
Before Reading	14
1 Gateshead Hall	19
2 Lowood School	27
3 Helen Burns	33
4 Mr Brocklehurst	36
5 Illness	40
6 Thornfield Hall	44
7 Mr Rochester	50
8 The Fire	56
9 Blanche Ingram	62
10 Secrets	67
11 Back to Thornfield	72
12 Escape	81
13 A New Life	86
14 Conclusion	94
After Reading <small>with</small> <b>NEW ACTIVITIES</b>	95
<b>LIFE SKILLS</b> Cinderella stories?	106

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**Charlotte Brontë** was born in 1816. Her father was a clergyman• and the family lived in a parsonage• in Haworth, a small village in Yorkshire, England. Her mother died when she was five and Charlotte and her brother and sisters were brought up• by their aunt. For a short time she attended a school with her older sisters Maria and Elizabeth and her younger sister, Emily. However, when Maria and Elizabeth both died of tuberculosis• in 1825, Charlotte and Emily left the school and were

taught at home by their father.

Charlotte worked for a short time as a governess• in Yorkshire, and then went to Brussels to learn French and later to teach there.

On her return to Yorkshire, she tried to open a school in Haworth together with her sisters Emily and Anne. But it was not a success because Haworth was too isolated. Instead she and her sisters turned to• writing.

In 1846 Charlotte persuaded her sisters to publish *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* (the sisters all had pseudonyms• because it was not common for women of the time to be writers). This was a commercial disaster. But in 1847 Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* was published and the book was an immediate success.

In 1854 Charlotte Brontë married Reverend A.B. Nicholls but she died the following year, aged only 39.

- **brought up:** looked after (when a child)
- **clergyman:** priest
- **governess:** woman who lives with a family and teaches their children at home
- **parsonage:** house that the Church of England gives a priest to live in
- **pseudonyms:** names used by writers instead of their own names
- **tuberculosis:** a serious infectious disease
- **turned to:** started



WHAT'S  
SO SPECIAL  
ABOUT

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**JANE?**



### A NOVEL OF CONTRASTS

Why does *Jane Eyre* continue to fascinate modern readers? The intensity of the feelings, the richness of the language, and the powerful representation of passion in its dramatic plot are only some of the reasons. *Jane Eyre* is a very unusual novel, full of contrasts and opposing concepts. Critics have tried to categorize the various conflicting forces in

the novel by labelling them passion versus duty, passion versus reason, Romanticism versus Rationalism, Nature versus Christianity, and so on. But these labels are simplistic, because the divisions cut across each other in complex ways. And in *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë gives voice to these conflicting forces by dramatizing both



sides of each issue. This richness of contrasts and even contradictions is the strength of the book. The novel reflects

the history of romantic love in the West, where most often passion is in marked contrast to a Christianized idea of love.

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## FOLLOWING TRADITION

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The novel is both original and yet a direct descendent\* of earlier works of literature. On the one hand, Brontë's novel reflects the tendencies of the time and includes various aspects of Victorian fiction. The influence of the Gothic novel is also evident and the author seems to reuse Byronic and Gothic models for the characters of Mr and Mrs Rochester. Last but not least, the novel belongs to yet another kind of narrative,

the *Bildungsroman*, or coming of age novel. It follows the main character, from childhood, through a series of trials\*, to maturity. *David Copperfield*, *The Mill on the Floss*, and *Great Expectations* are other famous examples of this kind of narrative. Brontë's novel follows a scheme in which education, marriage and motherhood, according to the Victorian view, are all seen as steps in the real purpose of Jane's life.

- **categorize:** organize in separate groups or categories
- **concepts:** ideas
- **cut across:** (here) affect
- **descendant:** (here) linked to the past

- **labelling:** putting names or labels
- **representation:** (here) description
- **simplistic:** too simple
- **trials:** (here) problems
- **versus:** against

# 1 Gateshead Hall

 It was raining heavily and very cold outside. My aunt, Mrs Reed, was lying on a sofa in front of the fire in the drawing room<sup>•</sup>. Her three children Eliza, John, and Georgiana were sitting around her but she didn't want me there.

'Jane, you can sit with us when you become more pleasant,' she said. 'Now go away and be quiet.'

I went into the breakfast room and chose a book from the bookcase<sup>•</sup>. Then I climbed into the window seat<sup>•</sup> behind the curtain with it.

Suddenly the door opened.

'Hello!' cried John Reed. Then he paused. He thought the room was empty.

'Where is she?' he continued. 'Lizzy! Georgy! Jane isn't here. Tell mama she's gone out in the rain!'

Eliza put her head round the door. 'She's behind the curtain, John.'



I came out immediately. I didn't want to be pulled out by John.

'What do you want?' I asked.

'Say, "What do you want, Master Reed?"' John answered. He sat down in an armchair and continued, 'I want you to come here.'

John Reed was fourteen – four years older than me and he bullied<sup>•</sup> me continually. I was very afraid of him. No one in the house took my side<sup>•</sup>. The servants were too afraid and his mother, Mrs Reed, didn't notice. I was completely alone.

I came up to his chair and he stuck out his tongue at me.

- 
- **bookcase:** 
  - **bullied:** hurt and frightened because I was smaller and less powerful

- **drawing room:** comfortable room in a large house used for relaxing
- **took my side:** supported me
- **window seat:** seat below a window

I knew that he wanted to hit me. As I looked at him I thought, ‘How ugly you are.’

Maybe he knew what I was thinking because he suddenly lifted his hand and hit me hard. I fell back a step or two from his chair.

‘That is for being rude to my mama,’ said John, ‘and for hiding behind curtains, and for looking at me in that way – you rat!’

I was sure he wanted to hit me again.

‘What were you doing behind the curtain?’ he demanded.

‘I was reading.’

‘Show me the book.’

I returned to the window seat and picked up the book.

‘You have no right to take our books. You aren’t part of our family. You have no money. Your father left you nothing. You have no right to live here with gentlemen’s children like us and eat the same meals that we eat and wear clothes that our mama buys for you. I’ll teach you to take my books! Because they are mine. Everything in this house will be mine in a few years. Go and stand by the door.’

I did and John threw the book at me. I fell and hit my head. It started to bleed and was very painful. Suddenly I felt angry.

‘Wicked and cruel boy!’ I said. ‘You are like a murderer! You are like the Roman emperors!’

‘What! What!’ he cried. ‘Did you hear her, Eliza and Georgiana? I’ll tell mama!’

He ran towards me, grabbed my hair and shook me. I fought back furiously.

‘Rat! Rat!’ he shouted.

- **cruel:** very unkind and wanting to cause pain
- **grabbed:** took suddenly and with force
- **have no right:** are not authorised to
- **wicked:** bad

Eliza and Georgiana ran to find Mrs Reed. They came back with Bessie the nurse• and Miss Abbot the maid• behind them.

‘Can you believe it? She attacked Master John!’ I heard someone say.

‘Take her away to the red room,’ said Mrs Reed. ‘And lock the door.’

Bessie and Miss Abbot took hold of me. I fought them and tried to escape.

‘Hold her arms, Miss Abbot,’ shouted Bessie. ‘She’s like a mad cat.’

When we got to the red room, they pushed me onto a chair.

‘Sit still or I’ll tie your hands,’ said Bessie.

‘I won’t move,’ I promised and held the chair with my hands.

They stood and looked at me. Their faces were very serious.

‘Don’t forget, Miss,’ Bessie began, ‘that you owe a lot to• Mrs Reed. The only reason that you aren’t in the poorhouse• is because she looks after you.’

I didn’t reply. The words weren’t new to me.

Then Bessie and Miss Abbot left me. They shut the door and locked it behind them.

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Jane

What do we know about Jane? Tick (✓) the correct boxes.

- She is an orphan.
- She has no money.
- She is not happy.
- She is not welcome in the home where she lives.
- She has a good relationship with her cousins.
- She is a servant in the house.

- **maid:** (here) woman who works as a servant in someone’s house
- **nurse:** (here) woman who takes care of someone’s young children

- **owe a lot to:** (here) must thank
- **poorhouse:** building where very poor people could live and eat



The room was cold because it was never used. Mr Reed, my uncle, died in this room nine years ago and everyone believed the room was haunted by his ghost<sup>•</sup>. I couldn't remember my uncle but I knew that he was my mother's brother. My parents died when I was a baby and Mr Reed took me into his house. Before dying he made Mrs Reed promise to look after me and treat me as one of her own children. Perhaps Mrs Reed tried but she was unable to love me. I wasn't her child and I wasn't pretty or happy. How could I be happy?

I stayed in the red room all night. It was terrible. My mind was full of nightmares and voices. I was so frightened that I fainted<sup>•</sup>. When they found me in the morning, they called Mr Lloyd the doctor to look at me. He asked me lots of questions. He was a kind man and I told him about my cruel cousin, John Reed, and about my unhappiness. Mr Lloyd listened to my story. Then he asked if he could talk to Mrs Reed. He suggested a solution to everyone's problems. Mrs Reed must send Jane Eyre away to school.

Soon I was well again but nobody in the house talked to me and I was treated worse than before. But things were changing.

November, December, and half of January passed. Christmas and the New Year were celebrated at Gateshead Hall with the usual festive cheer. Everyone exchanged presents and there were lots of dinners and evening parties. I was excluded from all enjoyment of course. In the evenings I sat on the stairs and watched while my cousins had fun. Then I went back to the lonely, silent nursery. I sat looking at the fire with only my doll for company. Human beings must love something and I loved my doll.

• **fainted:** lost consciousness

• **haunted by his ghost:** his ghost often appeared there

An illustration of a woman with dark hair in a bun, wearing a light blue long-sleeved dress with a white collar. She is holding a small doll with dark hair and a white face. The background shows a bed with white linens and a wooden headboard. The scene is dimly lit, with a shadow of the woman on the wall behind her.

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## Love

Jane says: 'Human beings must love something.'

Do you agree?

Who and what do you love?



Only Bessie was nice to me and I preferred her to anyone else at Gateshead Hall. It was Bessie who, on the fifteenth of January, came running upstairs to find me in the nursery.

‘They want to see you in the breakfast room,’ she told me in a great hurry. She pushed me to the top of the stairs and went back into the nursery.

I slowly went down the stairs and entered the room. My aunt was sitting by the fire. A tall man in black stood beside her.

‘This is the little girl that I wrote to you about,’ said Mrs Reed.

The man turned his head towards me and looked at me for a long time.

‘Your name, little girl?’ he asked.

‘Jane Eyre, sir,’ I replied.

‘Well, Jane Eyre, and are you a good child?’

Mrs Reed answered for me, ‘The less said about that the better, Mr Brocklehurst.’

‘Oh dear,’ was his reply. ‘I don’t like naughty children. Do you know where wicked people go after they die?’

‘They go to hell,’ I answered.

‘Do you say your prayers night and morning?’ continued Mr Brocklehurst.



‘Yes, sir.’

‘Do you read your Bible?’

‘Sometimes.’

‘And the Psalms?’ I hope you like them?’

‘No, sir.’

‘No? How shocking! That proves you have a wicked heart. You must pray and ask God to change it.’

‘Mr Brocklehurst,’ interrupted Mrs Reed. ‘I hope you can accept this girl at Lowood School. She is deceitful• and a liar• and she must learn to be humble•. I would like to send her immediately. She will stay full-time and spend all the holidays there too.’

‘Of course, madam,’ said Mr Brocklehurst. ‘Your decisions are wise. We will teach Miss Eyre humility• and obedience•. Our girls are all humble and obedient. We have great success at Lowood School.’

- **deceitful:** that hides the truth
- **liar:** someone who tells lies
- **humble:** not believing that you are important
- **obedience:** doing as you are told to do
- **humility:** being able to recognise your own bad qualities
- **Psalms:** sacred/holy songs and poems

Mr Brocklehurst left and I was alone with Mrs Reed. She started sewing. Neither of us said anything. I was feeling angry with her. She said I was deceitful and a liar but I wasn't. I tried hard to be good but nothing I did was good enough for my aunt. She wanted me to suffer.

After a while she looked up from her sewing.

'Go back to the nursery,' she said.

I got up and went to the door, stopped and came back again. I had to tell her. I took a deep breath.

'I am not deceitful,' I said. 'And I'm not a liar. I don't say I love you, because I don't. I hate you more than anyone in the world, except John Reed. Your daughter Georgiana tells lies, but I don't.'

Mrs Reed looked at me.

'I will never call you aunt again,' I continued. 'I will tell people how you have treated me, how cruel you have been to me.'

'How dare you say that, Jane Eyre!'

'How dare I, Mrs Reed? How dare I? Because it is the truth. You think I have no feelings and that I can survive without love or kindness. But I can't, and you have no pity. You locked me in the red room because your wicked boy hit me. I'll tell anybody who asks me. I'll tell them the truth. People think you are a good woman but you are bad and mean. You are deceitful!'


- **how dare you:** used to express anger about something someone has done or said
- **pity:** feeling of sympathy and understanding

- **sewing:**



## AFTER READING PLOT AND THEME

---

1  Jane Eyre and her story have strong signs of early feminism. Put the following in the correct order. Then, with a partner, find each episode in the book, and prepare a question and answer session with Jane Eyre about at least two of them.

- a  Jane advertises and finds her first job as a governess with a good salary.
- b  Jane returns to Mr Rochester when she is his independent equal – she has her own money and is no longer in his employment.
- c  Jane wants to be independent and is happy to find a new job when she leaves Thornfield Hall.
- d  Jane will not become Mr Rochester's mistress.
- e  Jane studies and works hard to become a governess.

2 Match the different motivations behind these relationships to the couples.

- a  Jane Eyre and Mr Rochester
- b  Mr Rochester and Blanche Ingram
- c  Mr Rochester and Bertha Rochester
- d  Jane Eyre and St John Rivers

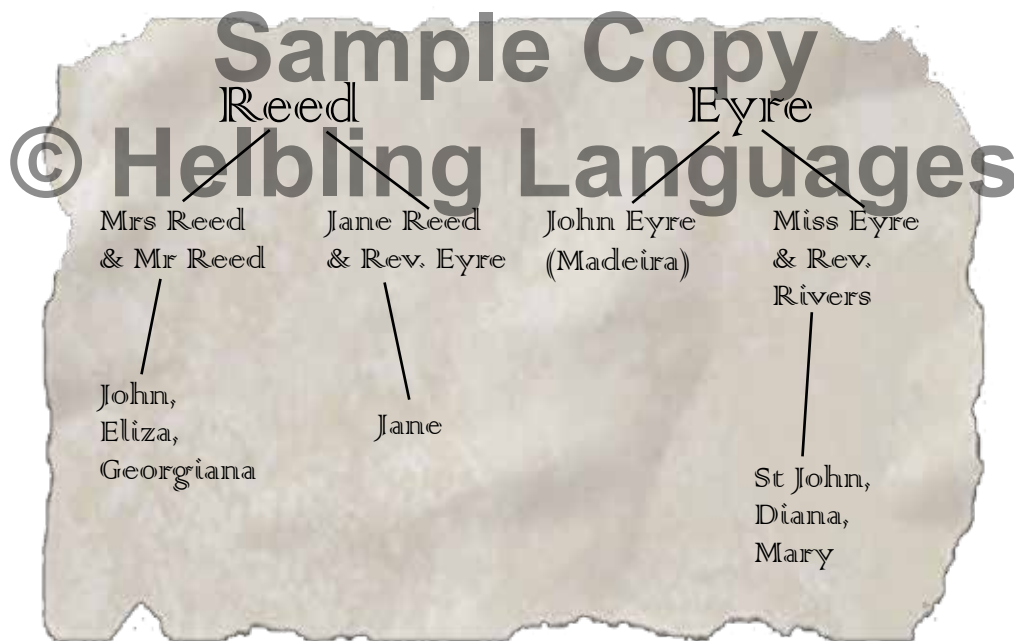
- 1 help with missionary work
- 2 love
- 3 political or social union
- 4 money



3 Forgiveness is an important theme in the story. Write down examples of how these characters show signs of forgiveness.

Helen Burns	
Mr Rochester	
Jane Eyre	

4 At the beginning of the story Jane Eyre is a lonely orphan living with cousins who hate her, but by the end Jane's wish for a loving family comes true and she finds some more cousins. Look at this family tree for Jane Eyre. Underline the characters who actually appear in the story.



# CHARLOTTE BRONTË

# JANE EYRE

Adapted by Frances Mariani

“Human beings must love something.”

Poor orphan Jane Eyre lives an unhappy childhood. She is hated by her guardian aunt and cousins and then sent to the strict and loveless Lowood School.

But life at school improves, and Jane stays on as a teacher, though she still longs for friendship and love.

Jane takes on a job as governess at Thornfield Hall, where she meets the charismatic yet mysterious Mr Rochester.

Has she found the love she has been waiting for? And what is the terrible secret in Thornfield’s attic?

Recording in British English



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