

Jane Eyre

Study Guide for GCSE

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Teacher's Introduction

The guide comprises the following sections:

- **Plot Summary:** Brief outline of the main events and structure of the narrative.
- **Chapter-by-Chapter Analyses:** Detailed analysis of the novel, with tasks and exercises throughout.
- **Characterisation and Relationships:** Analyses of key characters in the novel and the techniques used to create them, with focus on Jane, Helen, Rochester, and Bertha Mason.
- **Relationship mind map:** Visual mapping of the key relationships in the novel.
- **Settings:** The role of place, place names, and other significant settings in the novel.
- **Themes:** A detailed treatment of the key themes of the novel.
- **Ideas and messages:** Exploration of Brontë's key ideas in the text.
- **Language, structure and form:** Brontë's use of language, use of the novel form including generic elements and how these relate to structure.
- **Cultural, social and historical context:** Key aspects of cultural context on the position of women, including some biographical detail.
- **Glossary of key terms:** Explanation of literary and other terms used in the guide.

How to use this study guide

The resource is designed and written to support the teaching of the novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë as part of new 2015 (exams from 2017) English Literature GCSE preparation. To that end, it is created to address the Assessment Objectives for GCSE English Literature, and the modules of four examination specifications in particular: AQA, Edexcel, OCR, and Eduqas.

Assessment Objectives and Tasks


There are discussion points and exercises in each section which support various AOs. Some are aimed at group work, and others to enable further individual study and revision.

Assessment Objectives:


- ✓ Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response, and use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.
- ✓ Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.
- ✓ Show understanding of relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.
- ✓ Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

Key Features of Guide	Section
Key events and developments in <i>Jane Eyre</i> .	Plot summary
Visual guide to key relationships in the novel, with analyses of the development and nature of these.	Relationships map and analyses
Detailed chapter-by-chapter analyses of literary techniques, events, and development of relationships and plot, with important quotations.	Chapter analyses
Consideration of Brontë’s choice of formal and structural elements and language, and their effects upon the reader.	Language, structure, form
Analysis of key ideas and messages in the novel. Examination of settings and their role in the novel’s structure and themes.	Settings, themes, ideas, and messages
Information and analysis of the novel’s social and cultural contexts, including biographical information.	Social contexts
Explanation of literary and cultural terms used.	Glossary


Key for using this resource




This box signifies a definition of a key term.



Discuss...
This box provides a topic or question to provoke student discussion



Active Learning Task
 This box contains activities for students to complete to aid their understanding of the text



Did you know? This box contains useful extra information relating to the text.

June 2015

Edition of the text
The edition of the text that has been used is the Penguin edition ISBN 014043.0113.

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* resulting from minor specification changes, suggestions from teachers and peer reviews, or occasional errors reported by customers

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Specification Information

This resource is designed to correspond with the requirements of the specifications of the examination boards: AQA; Edexcel; OCR; and Eduqas, GCSE English Literature.

Assessment Objectives

AO1: Read, understand and respond to texts.

Students should be able to:

- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response
- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate

AO2: Analyse the language and structure used by a writer to create meaning and effect, using appropriate subject terminology where appropriate.

AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they are written.

AO4: Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, using appropriate punctuation.

Exam board specifications

AQA 8702

- Unit Paper 1: 'Shakespeare and the 19th century novel'. Total percentage of GCSE: 20%.
- Exam: written paper. Closed book. Duration: 1 hour 45 minutes.
- Section B: 'The Nineteenth Century Novel'. Students will answer ONE question on a text of their choice (e.g. *Jane Eyre*). They will write in detail about an extract from the novel, then write about the whole text.
- Marks total: 64. Section B: 30. Percentage of GCSE: 20%.
- Assessment Objectives assessed Sections A & B: AO1: 15; AO2: 15; AO3: 7.5; AO4: 7.5.

Edexcel IET0

- Component 2: 'Nineteenth-century Novel and Poetry since 1789'. Total percentage of GCSE: 20%.
- Exam: written paper. Closed book. Duration: 2 hours 15 minutes.
- Section A: 'Nineteenth-century novel'. Students will answer ONE essay question on a text of their choice (e.g. *Jane Eyre*). Extract approx. 400 words.
- Marks total: 80. Section A: 40. Percentage of GCSE: (25%).
- Assessment Objectives assessed for Section A: AO1: 10 (12.5%); AO2: 6 (7.5%); AO3: 6 (7.5%); AO4: 6 (7.5%).

Eduqas C701QSL

- Component 2: 'Post-1914 Prose and Drama, Nineteenth-century Prose and Unseen Poetry'. Total percentage of GCSE: 60%.
- Exam: written paper. Closed book. Duration: 2 hours 30 minutes.
- Section B 'Nineteenth-century Prose'. Students will answer ONE source-based question on a text of their choice from a prescribed list (*Jane Eyre*).
- Marks total: 80. Section B: 40. Percentage of GCSE 20%.
- Assessment Objectives assessed for Section B: AO1: 15; AO2: 10; AO3: 15.

OCR J352

- 'Exploring modern and literary heritage texts'. Total percentage of GCSE: 50%.
- Exam: written paper. Closed book. Duration: 2 hours.
- Section B: Students will answer ONE question from a choice of two on the text of their choice (e.g. *Jane Eyre*).
- Marks total: 80. Section B: 40. Percentage of GCSE 25%.
- Assessment Objectives assessed for Section A & B: AO1: 20; AO2: 17.5; AO4: 20.

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Plot Summary

Gateshead

The narrative begins with the protagonist and narrator, Jane Eyre, aged 10 years old, living unhappily at Gateshead with her widowed Aunt Reed and cousins Eliza John and Georgiana Reed. When Jane has a fight with John, she is punished by being confined to the sinister 'red-room'. After a violent protest and fainting fit, she is removed from Gateshead to Lowood School, run by Mr Brocklehurst. Jane's deceitfulness, voicing her passion at injustice.

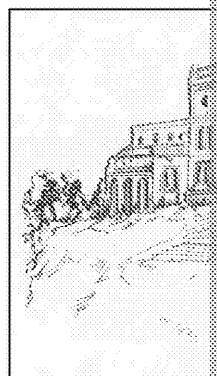
Lowood School

At Lowood Jane endures much physical hardship and psychological torment, but Miss Maria Temple, and Helen Burns, a sympathetic and religious girl. Brocklehurst. However, Miss Temple's kindness, Jane, who is promoted to a higher class and enjoys

Typhus spreads through the orphanage, and many pupils die. Helen contracts cold Miss Temple's room to see Helen; Helen dies during the night in her arms. An incident at Lowood leads to an improved school; Jane completes two years as a teacher then leaves for a governess post at Thornfield Hall and is accepted; the girl in her care

Thornfield Hall

When Jane walks alone in the grounds of Thornfield she frequently hears the laughter of Grace Poole, a servant. When Jane is out walking in the lanes, she helps a rider back onto his horse, which has slipped on the ice. Jane is later introduced to the rider as her wealthy employer, Edward Rochester. Rochester questions Jane on her origins and past, attributing magical powers to her. They converse and come to learn something of each other's characters, values and opinions.



Jane revisits the corridor where Grace Poole is seen; she is woken during the night by noises and is terrified. Jane discovers Rochester's room is on fire; she rescues him fearlessly. The encounter leads to a deep and romantic feelings toward him begin to develop. Despite rumours of his madness, Jane admits she is in love with Rochester.

Mr Mason from the West Indies arrives at Thornfield, disturbing Rochester. Jane hears cries for help. Mason has been attacked and is wounded; Rochester fetches him. Rochester talks of his coming marriage to Blanche Ingram.

Visit to Gateshead

Jane's Aunt Reed for a last time sends for her. Her aunt admits to having wronged her, dated three years earlier, from her Uncle John Eyre in Madeira, which requests that Jane return to Madeira as he wishes to adopt her and bequeath his fortune at his death. She reveals her love for her uncle and told him that Jane was dead from typhus.

Return to Thornfield

On a midsummer evening Jane walks in the orchard and encounters Rochester. He reveals his secret. Rochester, Jane reveals her love for him. Edward proposes to her; she accepts. With the wedding attire and honeymoon, Jane is made uncomfortable by the idea of her Uncle Eyre.

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Bertha Mason comes to Jane's room at night and tears Jane's wedding veil in two. Richard Mason intervenes and says that Rochester is already married to his sister. He reveals the confined Bertha to be a mad woman. Jane's hopes are destroyed: her marriage to Rochester, despite her profound love for him.

Moor House at Marsh End

Jane leaves Thornfield with nothing, and wanders the fields of Marsh End and begs for help from St John, a young clergyman. He and his sisters, Diana and Mary, take her in. When she tells them brief details of her life, she excludes her true name. The women find her work. Jane works in the local school, teaching and administrating.

The Rivers receive a letter that their estranged Uncle John has died and left thirty thousand pounds to another relation. Later, St John discovers that the Rivers are Jane's cousins: they have inherited 20,000 pounds and is now independent. Jane shares the money equally with her cousins. St John proposes marriage to Jane and a commitment in his missionary work to India. At first, Jane is attracted to him, but she rejects him as cold, controlling and loveless.

Ferndean

Jane is inspired to go and seek Rochester; she leaves Moor House for Thornfield. On the way, she learns from the innkeeper that Bertha had burnt it down, that she is dead, and Rochester is now blind. At Ferndean, Jane finds Rochester living alone, and she tells him her story. He accepts her and proposes again: she accepts. They are married; Adele is sent to a school. The narrative ends with Jane's happy marriage, which results in the birth of a son.



Writing skills task

Write a 'blurb' with which to sell this book to prospective readers.

Tip: Skills needed will include: summarising, describing, persuading.

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Chapters 1–4: Gateshead (Childhood)

Chapter 1

The narrator begins the narrative with a depiction of herself as a quiet, imaginative child. She is sent to live with her Aunt Reed and cousins John, Georgiana and Eliza at Gateshead. Despite her good nature, she is not accepted by them and gets in to an altercation with John, and strikes him. She is punished by her aunt by being locked in the sinister red-room.

Analysis

In her childhood, at Gateshead, Jane Eyre is dependent upon her relatives, the Reeds. In the first two chapters Jane describes how she is reminded of her financial dependence on her aunt by the servants of her financial dependence on her aunt. In the nineteenth century there was little social or financial support for women if she had not been taken care of by the Reeds she would have been forced to live in a state of destitute. For Jane, despite her materially comfortable existence at Gateshead – she has a room to live in – Jane is deprived of loving care.

Jane is excluded by her aunt for being unsociable and is judged by the servants as being to be 'more natural, as it were'. Fundamentally Jane is not accepted for who she is. She must learn to submit to the authority of her elders. But she will also seek out relationships with those who can accept her for herself and her good qualities.

We see Jane as a quiet, imaginative child, who withdraws to read. She is tormented and punished by being confined to the red-room*. Jane is threatened with the supernatural to say her prayers and seek forgiveness. As a result her character develops a strong sense of equality. Here, Brontë establishes one of the key ideas and messages in the novel: that she fails to please, but she cannot see why. Yet her adult self can reason and understand her experience. The adult narrator reflects and concludes: 'I was like nobody else with Mrs Reed or her children'.

*see 'Settings' for further discussion of the red-room.

Chapter 2

Resisting, Jane is taken to the sinister red-room by Bessie and Miss Abbot and locked in. Jane undergoes a rite of passage. She is very frightened, because she feels the room is transformed by the experience.

Analysis

Jane is constantly reminded by the servants and the staff, that she is dependent upon them and under obligations to Mrs Reed. 'She keeps you: if she were to turn you off you would be in the poorhouse'. This is a key note of her childhood at Gateshead: 'my miserable existence in the red-room hints of the same kind. This reproach of my dependence had become a voice in my ear; very painful and crushing, but only half intelligible'. Brontë intends to develop the theme of independence and its relationship to equality. It is a central strand of Jane's character that she becomes independent and builds her relationships with others upon a foundation of greater equality and mutual respect.

The red-room

The punishment of being locked in the red-room is the worst of Jane's time at Gateshead, suffering on her because of her sensitive nature as well as her sense of injustice.

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feelings and sensitive thoughts as a child. She is terrified of the thought of her uncle. If her uncle was a good man, it should be a kind spirit. This is a crucially decisive dramatic scene. Yet the adult in whose care she is shows no compassion for her. Brontë tries to show how isolated and dependent upon the adults who are responsible for them.

The red-room is a Gothic space* with a supernatural atmosphere, and is a place of imprisonment for Jane. It makes a deep impression on the young Jane: her 'imprisonment' there. This section shows us how Jane perceives herself as a supernatural or magical figure. When she sees her reflection and describes herself as looking 'like one of the tiny phantoms', the way she describes her in supernatural terms may suggest her own sense of undergoing a transformation – the rite of passage. The visual imagery may also announce this change to the reader. In this imagery Brontë draws upon the fairy-tale tradition, giving Jane a sense of magic which will be explored in her relationship to Rochester later on in the novel.

*For more see 'Settings'.

Chapter 10



Jane learns from the servants Bessie and Miss Abbot that she has had a fit, and 'seen a black dog'. The doctor visits her and advises that she attend a school. Bessie sings a song on a journey.

Analysis

Her experience in the red-room symbolises an ending to Jane's early childhood, and a new stage in her development.

Ballad is a song or poem from traditional folk culture, with a narrative. Usually in verses of four lines (quatrain) and with a refrain.



Use of song form

Bessie's ballad of a poor orphan child going on a journey is a traditional folk motif. It creates an emotional mood with parallels to Jane's life: the end of one stage, and the beginning of another. At this level, Jane is going on a journey and the words emphasise the importance of the leave-taking. On a more symbolic level, the song builds anticipation of Jane's spiritual journey and growth and development.

The use of folk song – an early cultural form – reinforces the association of Jane as an orphan girl of folk and fairy tales who must go on a journey that is a quest.

The apothecary (a chemist or doctor) Mr Lloyd, is a character whose role is to drive Jane to an outsider who suggests that she leave the household to attend school.

Discuss...

What effect does this scene have on Jane?



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Chapter 4

Jane challenges her aunt over the injustice of her confinement in the red-room. She confronts Mrs. Reed, the head of Lowood School, an imposing figure of authority. When she learns that her aunt already views her as a 'wicked' child, she voices her protest, and feels herself to be

Analysis

Jane's passionate nature is further expressed when she challenges the injustice of the morality of her aunt's treatment of her. Brontë emphasises the resilience of Jane's vulnerability. In the confrontation with missionary and Lowood School proprietor Mr. Brocklehurst, Jane's assertive character is unusual for characterisation of children in the period. She asks her questions honestly, yet is considered to be deceitful. Her aunt requests that at Lowood, Jane is 'to be made useful, to be kept humble'; this is the aim of the orphanage with regards to her social status. Brontë wants to emphasise her ideas about equality and power, and how Jane, as an orphaned, poor child, will be disadvantaged and strive to find equality in her relationships.

We learn how Jane perceives how prejudice that is instilled by Brocklehurst about her character may influence and harm her at Lowood School later on.

Character development

When Jane turns on her aunt accusing her of cruelty and deceitfulness, she is voicing her passion at injustice, and it is a significant scene for her personal strength and independence. She has found a new emotional strength and expression, and anticipates changes in her new life at school. Brontë has established there will be difficulties and obstacles at Lowood, but that she shows strength to overcome them. Jane declares to the reader, 'I was left there alone – winner of the field. It was the hardest battle I had fought; the first victory I had gained. I stood awhile on the rug, where Mr Brocklehurst had stood, and I enjoyed my conqueror's solitude'. (Ch. 4)



Practice exam question

What is the significance of Aunt Reed as a character in this section, and how does she influence Jane's development?

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Chapters 5–10: Lowood School

Chapter 5

Jane sets off for Lowood School. It has a harsh regime and living conditions. She has little empathy for her.

Analysis

In January, in cold wintertime, Jane goes to Lowood School on her own. Brontë focuses on the girls' routines and the harsh living conditions at the school with realism. Some of the character of Miss Temple with her 'fine features', 'pleasant air and carriage', and good qualities and the quality of her friendships are a significant counter to the ethos of the school.

Jane meets a fellow pupil, Helen Burns, reading a copy of *Rasselas*. From her choice of occupation, it is clear Helen is an intelligent and thoughtful girl, and one who is a little like her. Helen explains to Jane that they are living in an institution for orphans, contributions and managed by clergy. Jane sees Helen being punished by a teacher and dismissed to stand in the middle of the school room. Jane wonders how Helen can endure pain and humiliation with composure and without complaint. Brontë explores the different characters and reinforces the aspect of Jane's nature in her passionate hatred of the school, how it is the basis of Jane's own morality.

Chapter 6

Jane and the other girls endure physical hardships at the school. The food is poor and punishments are meted out to even the good students. Jane gets to know Helen Burns and her approach to injustice.

Analysis

Setting

Brontë emphasises the material conditions for the children living at Lowood. These are crucial to establishing the setting for this period in Jane's life. It is winter when she arrives and at Lowood, it is freezing cold in both the building and grounds, and the children are only entitled to small portions of food. This would keep them exhausted and vulnerable to poor health. Brontë describes these details carefully with realism; this is because with a realistic style here she aims to explore her ideas about inequality and poverty, and to show to her contemporary readers something of the life of the poor, and her sense of injustice about it.

Jane observes injustice everywhere at Lowood. Burns is a good student, yet she is punished and beaten with a twig broom. Jane questions Helen's failure to react, claim, and resist such punishment. Helen outlines her doctrine and view of how to behave, to comprehend the nature of endurance; and still less could I understand or sympathise with the expressed feelings of a chastiser. Still I felt that Helen Burns considered things by a light

Brontë thus emphasises the difference between the girls, and Jane's own religious beliefs which seeks fairness and stands up against suffering. Jane's compassionate nature, based upon justice, generosity and equality, is illustrated when Jane shares her food with the girls she knows are hungry.



Practice exam question

'The novel explores how people deal with hardship and suffering. Evaluate how Helen Burns and Jane Eyre respond to the hardships they face.'

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Chapter 7

Mr Brocklehurst visits the school and lectures the girls and controls the staff with his power. He is shown to be a hypocrite as well as a tyrant. He finds fault with Jane and humiliates her by standing her on a chair with a signboard.


Analysis

Satire

When Mr Brocklehurst visits the school, he is described as being ‘more rigid than ever’. Because his character is dispassionate and unfeeling, controlling and abusive of his power, he is associated with qualities of rock or stone. While Brontë has emphasised how important are the needs of the girls’ bodies for healthy

food and warm clothing, Brocklehurst is portrayed as neglecting their physical needs, by using his religion to justify his actions. Brontë criticises his attitude to the girls’ spirits. Brocklehurst argues, ‘you may indeed feed the body, but how you starve their immortal souls!’

Brontë uses satire to criticise Brocklehurst as a hypocrite. He instructs that the Lowood girls must all have their hair cropped short. When Mrs Reed arrives for a visit at the school, they are themselves dressed fashionably, including ‘elaborately curled’. In detailing the hypocrisy of Brocklehurst’s orders for the poor, Brontë underlines the indulgence allowed to the women of his own family, Brontë clearly underlines the contrast that are to be enforced through the institutions of Calvinist Christianity.



Practice exam question

How does Brontë’s characterisation of Brocklehurst comment on the poor and vulnerable?

Chapter 8

Helen Burns and Jane have tea in Miss Temple’s room; she hears Jane’s story and, moved by her suffering, is promoted to a higher class.

Analysis

Jane is overwhelmed by grief from her punishment; she feels the injustice keenly.

Helen discovers her and gives her comfort and reassurance that she is not judged but rather Brocklehurst is. Helen and Jane are invited for tea and cake in Miss Temple’s room; she finds Jane blameless. Jane and Helen find ‘a new serenity [...] refined propriety of language’. Jane sees in Helen how ‘some one’s character can expand under conditions of nourishment and kindness’. Scatcherd punishes Helen for untidy drawers, and Jane wears a ‘slag’ of mud around her forehead all day. In impassioned compassion, she tears it off and casts it in to the fire’.

Brontë illustrates how fair treatment produces good results in behaviour and confidence to aspiration and achievement: Miss Temple publicly exonerates Jane. Consequently, Jane works hard and is promoted to a higher class and discovers her ability and ambition. She is resolved to pioneer my way through every difficulty. I toiled hard and my success was proportionate to my efforts.’ (Ch. 8).

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Chapter 9

Tuberculosis spreads through Lowood orphanage; many pupils die. There is great suffering. Jane goes and plays in the woods and garden; she makes a new friend, Mary Ann. Mary Ann dies of consumption during the night, sleeping in Jane's embrace.

Analysis

Setting

Brontë reinforces the message of social inequality through the setting of Lowood. An outbreak of tuberculosis (TB) to spread and keep the inmates infected. Jane's death is due to 'semi-starvation and neglected colds had predisposed most of the pupils to receive the infection'. This situation is a realistic one, and a similar one to that in which Charlotte Brontë's two eldest sisters died as children.

Helen's death from consumption is poignant and sad, but without sentimentality because faith and the afterlife are discussed honestly by Jane; she is unafraid of death. Helen's death gives some comfort from the way in which Helen finds solace in her beliefs in the afterlife and being with God. This is similar to Charlotte Brontë's own experience of the death of her sisters, also from TB, and their religious conversion after death, which Charlotte writes about in her letters.

Character

After Miss Temple's departure her influence upon Jane cannot be sustained. When she is impetuously, less passionately under the regulating influence of Miss Temple, who admits that, 'my mind had put off all it had borrowed of Miss Temple [...] and the element, and beginning to feel the stirring of old emotions [...] the reason for transgression'.



Practice exam question

Explore how Brontë makes Jane's experiences at Lowood oppressive.
Tip: discuss the author's use of language to create atmosphere and describe the setting.

Chapter 10

An inquiry into TB at Lowood leads to the building of a new, improved school, which continues as a pupil for six years, gaining an excellent education; in addition, she becomes a teacher. Jane applies to Thornfield Hall, for the post of a governess for a young child.

Analysis

Brontë's treatment of ideas about equality and justice are treated more optimistically at the end of this section compared to the beginning. Mr Brocklehurst's influence on the rebuilt Lowood is diminished, and a more balanced group of interests, is diminished. The author's message is that treated with fairness and opportunity, individuals may thrive. Thus Jane gains an excellent education and remains at Lowood for some time as a teacher, developing her skills. Brontë emphasises that despite her hardship and suffering, Jane has survived and achieved personal and emotional development and growth.

Aged 18, Jane decides to apply to Mrs Fairfax, the housekeeper of Thornfield, and Adele Varens; so the current part of her life ends, and her late adolescence, living

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Chapters 11–17: Thornfield Hall (Late)

Chapter 11

Jane moves to Thornfield Hall to begin work as a governess; it appears to Jane as if there is something mysterious about the house. She hears strange laughter from the third storey of the house; Mrs Fairfax suggests it is a servant, but Jane is disturbed.

Analysis

Setting

The Gothic atmosphere of Thornfield Hall is soon established through the setting itself, through a mysterious character referred to as Grace Poole, but who the reader, like Jane, suspects has her identity to be concealed. The house, it is suggested, is haunted. Even the sensible housekeeper Mrs Fairfax remarks, 'if there was a ghost at Thornfield Hall, this would be its haunt'. Brontë creates a sense of mystery and suspense through Jane's early explorations of a new territory. While exploring the house, she encounters strange laughter on the third floor; she passes down a corridor where all the black doors are shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard's castle'. Mrs Fairfax suggests it is a servant, but a sense of mystery persists, as Jane is not wholly convinced by this explanation.



Jane describes hearing the laughter, and the present tense helps build a sense of immediacy, bringing the situation closer to the reader: 'A laugh – distinct, formal, mirthless – first, though very distinct, it was very low – murmurs', suggestive of strange speech, not specified – they are only 'murmurs'.

Chapter 12

When Jane walks alone in the grounds, as she is pacing she frequently hears the sound of a horse falling. She is trapped and restless, and reflects upon her limited sphere. While out walking she witnesses Mr Rochester falling from his horse which has slipped on the ice. He is hurt; she helps him to mount.

Analysis

Brontë's ideas and messages about women's position in her society are explored through Jane's reflections and thinking to herself. We already know Jane to be an imaginative character. As she walks, Jane fantasises about how constrained her life is. This reflects upon middle-class women's position in society, what is an explicitly feminist passage.

Brontë also begins to build the relationship between Jane and Bertha's characters, in which Bertha is seen as a 'dark double' for Jane. Jane's actions at the end of the chapter mirror Bertha's: the pacing of the corridors alone and the pained reflection of being trapped perhaps closely resemble Bertha's imprisoned state. Jane states that,

restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes. Then my mind's eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose. (Ch. 12)

In January, Jane is out walking in the lanes; the scene draws upon Gothic motifs of the moon. The moon is an important symbol in the novel, it is often described with significance to Jane's life is about to happen. Jane's symbolic horizons – her sense of possibility – are limited by her position as a governess.

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grow: her spirit is drawn to the moon and star-lit sky which 'expanded before me' in the scene, as the moon rises, Jane hears a horse coming and sees a leonine dog, like a gytrash of legend. Rider and horse slip on the ice and the man (it is Rochester, but they are not known to one another yet) must depend upon her help to ride on.

This scene is important for emphasising the theme of dependency and independence. The balance of power relations for Jane and Rochester's union are anticipated here. The incident also contributes to the folk tale structure of the narrative, because Jane is performing an act of help and kindness, despite her fear and anxiety about the presence of some female characters in fairy tales.



Exam practice

Explore how Brontë builds the drama of the scene of their first encounter.

Chapter 1



Jane is introduced to her employer, Edward Fairfax Rochester. She shows him her talent for drawing. A mutual understanding is established between them as they get to know one another.

Analysis

An interesting and sympathetic relationship between Rochester and Jane is quickly established through a number of regular meetings. Rochester's character is established as paradoxically both honest and candid, and as having some secret or mystery about him: a figure from Gothic romance. This perception is

reinforced through Mrs Fairfax's presentation of Rochester as a mysterious figure with a troubled past with family difficulties, building anticipation for the reader.

Rochester questions Jane on her origins and past, declaring when he met her, he

'thought unaccountably of fairy tales, and had half a mind to demand whether you had bewitched my horse'. They have both seen each other as having supernatural qualities, and this further illustrates a likeness and affinity between their characters.

Their respect and interest in each other's individuality, despite their social stations are emphasised. Jane shows him her watercolour paintings of mysterious and tragic subjects and Rochester is intrigued by her talents and her imagination: sympathy and understanding is created between them.

Active Learning Task

Write a page from Rochester's diary, describing his thoughts and feelings about Jane at this time.



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Chapter 14

Jane and Rochester converse and learn more of each other's characters, values and opinions; Rochester's hidden and dissolute past is introduced to the reader, although Jane does not understand it.

Analysis

Rochester and Jane have conversations in which they learn something more of each other's characters, values and opinions; Rochester hints at his dissolute or immoral past in connection with Adele, and his present unhappiness. In her inexperience and youth, Jane senses she doesn't understand all that he alludes to, but of course cannot be aware of what she does not know, particularly of his sexual experience. Rochester's past is clearly a burden to him. 'I could reform – I have strength yet for that – if – but what is the use of thinking of it, hampered, burdened, cursed as I am? Besides, my sin is irrevocably denied me, I have a right to get pleasure out of life and I will get it, cost what it may.' (Ch.14) Rochester is also being fair to Jane in that he is a survivor of hardship, albeit that he intends to find happiness.

Chapter 15

Rochester explains his past relationship with Celine Varens, the Parisian opera-dancer, to Jane. In Rochester's company Jane feels happier. She is woken in the night by a fire and discovers smoke and fire coming from a bedroom. She rescues Rochester from his bed. The intimacy of the rescue scene leads to deeper emotions between them.

Analysis

Jane finds that despite Rochester's faults, as a result of their relationship she feels better. She again uses the imagery of the moon to symbolise this development in Jane's sensory journey: 'my thin crescent destiny seemed to enlarge; the blanks of existence were improved; I gathered flesh and strength' (Ch.15). Jane is benefiting from her relationship, maturing perhaps both physically and emotionally.

Active Learning Task

How does Brontë build a Gothic atmosphere here? Discuss her use of language and other stylistic techniques.

Tip: consider the language of strong emotion and sensation.



The Gothic double relationship between Jane and Rochester is deepened. Jane does some haunting of her own: she musters courage and revisits the corridor where 'Grace Poole' was. Hearing 'a vague murmur, peculiar and lugubrious', Jane's curiosity and intuition lead her to saving Rochester.

The rescue scene in which Jane saves Rochester is a crucial one for development of themes, characterisation and the strength of Jane's character to act.

Jane is fearless and acts decisively, despite her misgivings and anxieties about the supernatural. '...a low, hoarse, and deep – uttered, as it seemed, at the very heart of the unquiet sea' is reiterated: and I knew it came from behind the pane.

In terms of themes and relationships, this scene builds the importance of equality and partnership between the two central characters. Jane is the active partner, and is not a victim of Bertha's destructive acts.

The scene is also significant for enabling an intimacy between them which breaches the convention that unmarried and unrelated men and women should not meet during the night, dressed in nightgowns. After his rescue, Rochester's romantic interest in Jane is aroused, and Jane too is affected. That night she was, 'tossed on a buoyant but unquiet sea, where billows of trouble and sense would resist delirium: judgement would warn passion' (Ch.15).

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Chapter 16

Jane suffers from jealousy and tries to control her growing emotional attachment to Rochester.

Analysis

Jane challenges Grace Poole, the servant, to try and understand how it can be she who set the storey on fire. But she finds it a mystery if Grace is to blame for the fire. She tries to explain her jealousy by imagining that Rochester has an old romantic attachment to Grace. The passage is through Jane's perceived comparison between herself and the beautiful and wealthy visitors to Rochester's visitors. Jane further regrets her feelings toward Rochester when she hears his 'powerful singing voice'.

Jane draws a self-portrait, entitling it 'Jane Eyre, a poor and plain' and 'a lowly, unaccomplished lady of rank'. She sees this as a 'course of wholesome discipline' to punish herself toward Rochester. She sees herself to be his social inferior, and therefore below his level of anticipation. This is a theme that will be explored and satirised by Brontë in the following chapters.

Chapter 17

Rochester holds a party at Thornfield; Jane recognises that she is in love.

Analysis

When Rochester is away from Thornfield, Jane misses him. He returns with guests and is reminded of her Aunt Reed. This is an indicator to the reader of the character of Blanche as someone morally inferior to Jane. Brontë satirises the company for their attitude toward poor governesses of a lower social standing, portraying the characters – particularly the Ingrams – unsympathetically as cruel, insensitive, and vain.

Jane in her hidden window seat (an echo of her position as a dependent and social inferior at Gateshead) also observes Rochester's effect upon the women present, and finds that they do not see his qualities as she does. She admits at length her love with Rochester:

he is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine [...] Though rank and wealth set him apart from something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates him to me (Ch. 17)

Active Learning Task

Write a Facebook post or a Tinder page for Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester.

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Chapters 18–23: Return to Thornfield

Chapter 18

Mr Mason arrives. Rochester dresses up and tells fortunes, disappointing Blanche.

Analysis

Brontë's analysis of class and gender is developed through Jane's observations of Blanche and other women in the company staying at Thornfield. Jane finds them lacking in humane and sensitive feeling and in advanced thought and intellect. She can compare herself favourably to Blanche in these qualities of character, and is therefore no longer jealous of Blanche.

Rochester continues his game of deception of Jane with his disguise, or masquerade, as a gypsy woman. Blanche returns from having her fortune told, dissatisfied and disappointed. Although the reader does not learn what exactly has been said to Blanche on the subject of marriage, we might assume that 'game' in order to disappoint Blanche in her hopes of a marriage to him.

Chapters 19 & 20

Jane visits the 'gypsy' fortune teller. Richard Mason is attacked during the night; Jane attends Mason.

Analysis

Rochester, in the character of the fortune teller, accurately reflects upon Jane's character: her bliss is near if only she will be ready to receive it – confirming to the reader Rochester's opinion of her. In this way, Brontë creates a 'test' upon Jane's character, and her integrity. Such a test confirms the qualities that she is sensible and discreet to the reader: she does not confess any feelings for Rochester. This would further raise his opinion of Jane.

Mr Mason's is a mysterious appearance which at this stage remains unexplained, but suspense is built through his effect of disturbing Rochester, prompting the reader's curiosity. He is Bertha's brother, and his character is significant to the plot as he will play the role of another victim of Bertha's violence, as well as later for his part in revealing Rochester's intended bigamy.

In Chapter 20, Jane wakes in the full moonlight, to hear a cry: 'a savage, a sharp, a shrilly sound', followed by cries for help. Rochester fetches Jane to attend the wounded Mr Mason. She bravely rises to his aid and tends to him, demonstrating the strength and intelligence of her character, and her desire to serve his trust in her.

...the moon, which was full and bright [...] looked in at me through the uncurtained window [...] I opened my eyes on her disc – silver-white and crystal clear (Ch. 20).



Practice exam question

Examine the presentation of the moon in this passage, and in the novel. *Tip: consider how the moon is linked to Jane, and its symbolism, relation to the plot.*

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Chapter 21

Jane visits Gateshead and learns news from her dying aunt about her Uncle Eyre's cruelty toward her in childhood, before Mrs Reed dies.

Analysis

Symbolism

Brontë links Jane's dreams, their motifs, and the superstition of folklore. The motif of the chapter, Jane's dream is said to be a warning of difficulties, or a portent of trouble for her husband, who advises her that her Aunt Sarah Reed has asked for her to visit: John Reed's reckless lifestyle, and she is dying. Jane and Rochester's wrangle over leave and their relationship. Jane travels 100 miles to Gateshead where she finds her cousins Mr

Brontë develops the plot to prepare the reader for Jane's later inheritance of her fortune. She recalls to Jane how her husband, who was Jane's mother's brother – took in the money, died, loved and even married her, which enraged both her and her children. Aunt Reed dated three years earlier, from her uncle John Eyre in Madeira to the aunt, which she told him as he was to adopt her and bequeath his fortune at his death. She reveals that she told him that Jane was dead from typhus.

This episode also explores Jane's emotional and psychological development, after Jane finds that the Reed family's behaviour toward her no longer emotionally overpowers her maturity and growth. This treatment of Jane's character development is shown to Mrs Reed, and the way in which Jane has learnt emotional restraint and reason to feel forgiveness for her aunt's cruelty to her as a child.

Brontë demonstrates that happiness and unity in a family can only be developed through fairness. Because the Reed family were unable to express and demonstrate these values, the breakdown. Jane is clearly shown as the survivor of the family. Georgiana and Eliza are shown and ruin of the family differently. One seeks her own independent life in a conventional marriage, indicating two distinct choices for women at this time in the nineteenth century.

*see 'Social Context' for further discussion.



Exam practice

Consider how Mrs Reed is presented in this extract (Ch. 21).

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Chapters 22 & 23


Jane returns to Thornfield. Rochester tries to confess to Jane about his marriage, Chapter 23, in the orchard, Jane admits her feelings; Rochester proposes marriage. Lightning.

Analysis

When Jane returns to Thornfield she is welcomed by Rochester. He tries to tell Jane about his marriage to Bertha and how it was a mistake, but decides that Jane would not accept this situation, knowing her morals and innocence. Rochester withdraws emotionally from Jane and resorts to deception: he talks of his coming marriage to Blanche Ingram.

Brontë deploys the literary technique of objective correlative to heighten the atmosphere and significance of this scene: on Midsummer Eve in a glorious hot storm corresponds with her tumultuous period of life as a young woman – Jane walks alone in the night and meets Rochester. He tells her he has found her a situation of work in Ireland when he is married to Blanche Ingram. Jane is tortured by his words, and admits to him. Seated at the base of the chestnut tree, Edward proposes to her; she accepts.

Rochester refers obliquely to his marriage to Bertha, and to the ‘world’s judgement’ on their union and future happiness. Brontë extends her use of objective correlative, describing the weather and its effects upon the garden, to signal the troubled future of their relationship. Lightning strikes. ‘...we were all in shadow [...] What ailed the chestnut tree? It was the storm, it roared in the laurel walk, and came sweeping over us’ (Ch. 23). In the morning, after the storm, lightning has struck the tree. Symbolic of Rochester and Jane’s relationship, it has been a bigamous deception: ‘...the great horse chestnut at the bottom of the orchard had been killed last night, and half of it split away’ (Ch. 23).



Exam practice

Consider the ways in which Jane and Rochester’s relationship is represented in this extract (end of Ch. 23).

Chapters 24 & 25

Rochester and Jane make wedding preparations. Jane is visited in the night by Bertha, who is troubled and anxious about the coming wedding.



Analysis

Brontë’s criticism of the wedding plans is very critical, expressed through dialogue between Rochester and Jane. Jane is pragmatic and pragmatic. For example, when Rochester wishes to buy expensive dresses and silk for dresses and she rebels: ‘the more he bought the more I rebelled with a sense of annoyance and degradation’ (Ch. 24). She also expresses her independence concerning him leaving her his wealth, and her independence would free her from dependence, which for her is a burden.

I never can bear being dressed like a doll by Mr Rochester. I would rather be Danaë with the golden shower falling daily round me. I would rather be a moment I get home [...] if I had but a prospect of one day’s independence, I could better endure to be kept by Mr Rochester than to be kept by Mr Rochester.

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Brontë develops symbolism of Jane and Rochester's relationship. When Jane walks in the garden she looks at the lightning-damaged chestnut tree. It predicts what their union will be like:

I faced the wreck of the chestnut-tree; it stood up, black and riven: the trunk split down the centre, gaped ghastly. The cloven halves were not broken from each other, for the firm base and strong roots kept them unsundered below.

Discuss...

How is Brontë's language effective in creating this symbolism?

Jane also tells Rochester of a dream which is a bad one. In it, she carries a helpless infant in her arms. The child is her new love that has grown between herself and Rochester. However, 'I was burdened with the charge of a little child: a very, snuggly creature, too young to be able to walk, and

which shivered in my cold arms, and sobbed piteously in my ear. [...] while you, I felt, withdrew a little farther every moment' (Ch. 25).

She then recalls how she felt she had been visited by a strange woman in the night by candlelight, who tore her wedding veil in two. In the morning she finds that the veil has really been destroyed. Rochester dismisses it as a dream.

Active Consideration in this does

Chapters 26 & 27

The wedding is prevented, and Rochester's wife, Bertha, revealed to Jane. Unable to live with this, Jane leaves Rochester and Thornfield Hall.

Analysis

The drama of the ruined wedding is created through the gradual revealing of hidden identities. Firstly, the identity of the witness – revealed to be the solicitor of Richard Mason – who intervenes and declares that his client's sister was married to Rochester in Spanish Town, Jamaica. Mason too steps forward. Then the true identity of the disruptive and disturbing attacker, thought to be Grace Poole, is finally explained. Rochester admits the truth and takes everyone present back to Thornfield and reveals Bertha. His repetition of the word 'mad' reinforces his, and perhaps the reader's, conviction that her insanity is the whole of her identity, and the reason for her concealment, and his deception:

Bertha Mason is mad; and she came of a mad family! Madmen and madwomen, and mad children, for three generations! Her mother, the Creole, was a madwoman and a drunkard! – as I found out after I had married her daughter: for they were silent about the family secrets before (Ch. 26).

Jane is left feeling isolated, and longing to be dead. 'Jane Eyre, who had been an ardent expectant woman – almost a bride – was a cold, solitary girl again [...] a Christmas frost had come at midsummer. I looked at my love [...] it shivered in my heart, like a suffering child in a cold cradle' (Ch. 26). This imagery of the 'suffering child' appears to reinforce the symbolism of Jane's dream, in which she is burdened with a small, vulnerable child, representing the love or relationship between herself and Rochester.

In Chapter 27, Jane wrestles with herself and her feelings on knowing the truth about their bigamous relationship. Rochester confronts and cares for her in her distress. He describes his marriage to Bertha Mason as an arranged

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marriage, as his father planned to leave all his wealth to his older son; he tells her of his travels to Thornfield and toured the Continent, taking up with three mistresses, but leaving her. Despite this crisis in their relationship, Brontë aims to reinforce her presentation of Jane's sympathy with Jane. He professes enduring and profound love for Jane. His narrative is an assessment of her character and what he values in her is entirely in accord with her actions and description of her behaviour, showing them to be entirely in harmony with each other.

Jane displays a stubborn adherence to values and chooses to leave Rochester and maintain her integrity. Rochester protests and tries to reason with her:

what a distortion in your judgement, what a perversity in your ideas, is provoked by the fact that you transgress a mere human law, no man being injured by the breach? (Ch. 27)

Discuss...

How do you as a reader feel about Jane's decision to leave Rochester?
Why does Rochester react with anger?
Why/why not?

Brontë uses the motif of the moon, as a symbol of something that appears at significant moments in the narrative. That night, the moon – personified – looks out of Jane's window and speaks to her spirit, telling her to leave Rochester:

She broke forth as never moon yet burst from the clouds. A white human form shone [...] It gazed and gazed on me. It spoke to my spirit, tempting me to leave. "Mother, I will." (Ch. 27)

Jane leaves at dawn, without possessions or money, and with no sense of intention or direction. Desperately, she takes a coach as far as her twenty shillings will take her.



Exam practice

Explore how Bertha is presented and how others react to her in this chapter and elsewhere in the novel.

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Chapters 28–35: Moor House (W)

Chapters 28–30

Jane becomes destitute, but comes across a cottage – Moor House – where she is taken in by St John, and his sisters, Diana and Mary.

Analysis

Set down by the coach at Whitcross, Jane is eventually forced to beg from a servant in the village. At night she becomes delirious and weak with hunger and cold. The story follows the tropes of a fairy-tale narrative: like a lost, poor orphan, in a fairy tale, Jane sees a magical place where she will be both helped, and have her character developed.

Trope:

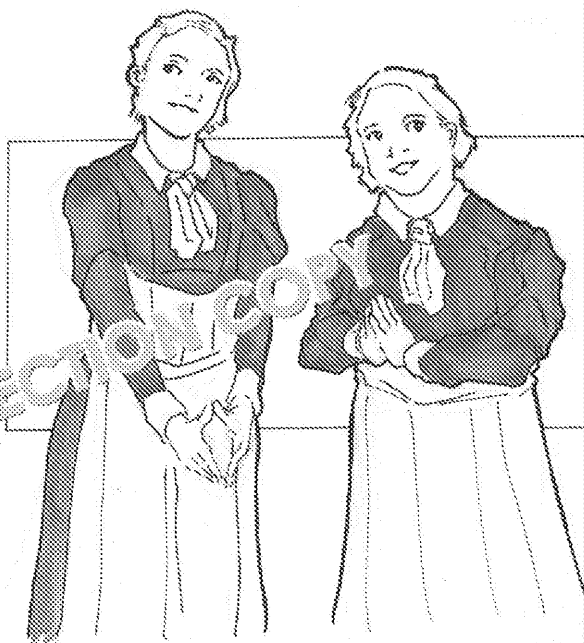
A figure of speech, which is repeated in a text; for example, a word, phrase or image which is used repeatedly to produce a particular effect and convey a particular meaning. Metaphors and allegories are kinds of tropes.

Moor House is described like a magical place where Jane will be both helped, and have her character developed. When the servant, turns her away, St John Rivers, a young clergyman, admits her and she is cared for until she revives.

In Chapters 29 and 30 Jane, revived, gets to know the inhabitants of the cottage: Hannah, a servant, St John, and his sisters, Diana and Mary Rivers, and tells them brief details of her life. The character of St John appears

considerate at first, although without emotion. Jane finds that she has much in common with them and they become intimate friends during a month living together. Jane listens to them and is to be disappointed but ambitious.

Jane's need for independence asserts itself; St John finds her a job in the local school. However, that he does 'almost rave in his restlessness' and sees in Jane that she, too, needs independence. At this stage, we are still unsure if he is a sympathetic character or not – Brontë's presentation of him is ambiguous.



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Chapters 31 & 32

Jane becomes a schoolteacher at Morton. She is living by her principles but this means she lacks fulfilment and happiness.

Analysis

Jane makes her own home, and works by teaching at Morton School; she is not dependent on anyone. In herself she has made the right moral decision, according to her own principles and beliefs.

Which is better? – to have surrendered to temptation; listened to passion; met the struggle – but to have sunk down in the silken snare [...] to be a slave in a foreign land [...] – or to be a village schoolmistress, free and happy, in a breezy mountainous part of England? [...] God directed me to a correct choice: I thank His Providence for it.


Thus Brontë draws a stark contrast between the choices Jane had and the moral choices she has for her, in relation to the themes of her independence and equality.

Character analysis and relationship development

Brontë gradually builds up to the revelation of their family relationships. The Rivers are estranged Uncle John, their mother’s brother, has died and left thirty guineas to Jane in his will, a distant relation. They are also orphans, their father having recently died. Thus another bond is formed between Jane, yet at this point in the plot none of them are aware that they are cousins. St John spends some time with Jane, and again confesses his boredom in becoming a clergyman, as he has suppressed his career ambitions. Jane observes his repressed emotion for Miss Rochester. Thus we learn more about his character, and his attitude toward women.

Brontë clearly describes how Jane’s emotional and romantic attachment to Rochester is a central theme of the novel.

... at this period of my life, my heart far oftener swelled with thankfulness than with love. [...] I used to rush in to strange dreams at night [...] I still again and again met him at some exciting crisis; and then the sense of being in his arms [...] the hope that, on this side, would be renewed, with all its first force and fire. (Ch. 32)



Exam practice

The novel explores the theme of self-identity. Evaluate the ways in which Jane develops her self-identity.

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Chapters 33–35

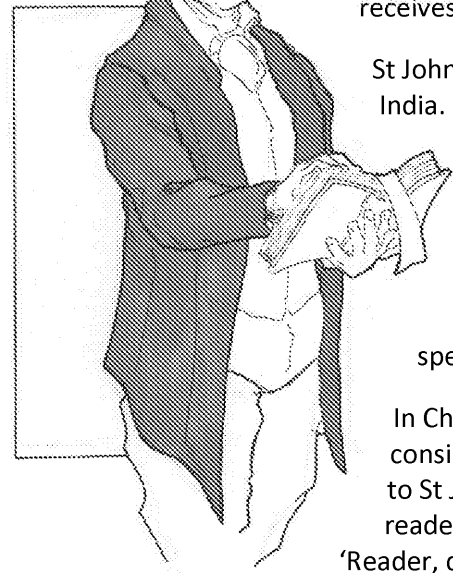
St John reveals to Jane that he has found out her identity and life story, and informs her of her fortune, but he appears unaffected. He becomes more controlling and directing of her life, proposing marriage to her. She refuses, and flees.

Analysis

Relationship

Jane and St John’s relationship develops considerably in these two chapters. When Jane shares her newly inherited fortune with her cousins, John appears largely unaffected by the news. His relationship: ‘I am cold: no fervour infects me’. In contrast, once Jane learns they are cousins, she feels ‘whereas I am hot, and fire dissolves ice’. She secures the inheritance through a lawyer and moves to Marsh End, planning to stay and create domestic harmony.


Yet St John does not value Jane’s domestic efforts: a symptom of his coldness. Jane’s use of the language of natural elements to compare him. Jane reflects that his lack of interest in domestic life would not make a good husband. He asks to teach Jane French and learning German. Jane writes to Mrs Fairfax and Briggs for advice but receives no reply.



St John proposes marriage to Jane, and accompanies her to India. Initially obedient to St John’s commands, she eventually, through reasoning, refuses, unless she can go with him. Jane is perceptive and because of her relationship with him that they are entirely incompatible. He is the opposite: he is ice to her fire. ‘I was so far from my moods and occupations were acceptable to me, that my effort to sustain or follow any other became a spell.’ (Ch. 34).

In Chapter 35, Jane resumes studies with St John in consideration of his proposal. The outcome is in Jane’s favor to St John because of his patience and will to support her. The reader directly, a technique which adds depth to the narrative. ‘Reader, do you know, as I do, what terror those cold questions, their questions? How much of the fall of the avalanche was breaking up of the frozen sea in their displeasure?’(Ch. 35).

When she appeals to heaven to show her the answer, in the moonlight, she thinks of going outside to find him. The power of Nature has done its work: she abandons St John. ‘It was my time to assume ascendancy. My powers were in me, and in force’ (Ch. 35).

**Exam practice**

1. Compare how St John is presented in this extract, and elsewhere in the novel. How does Brontë present Jane as a strong female character in this extract, and in the novel as a whole?

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Chapters 36–38: Ferndean (Maturity)

Chapters 36–38

With a supernatural inspiration, Jane leaves Moor House for Thornfield. But she finds Rochester is married. She learns that Rochester is alive but blinded, and Bertha dead. She is reunited with Rochester and proposes again; they get married. Adele is sent to a good school. The narrative ends with their marriage, with the birth of a son.

Analysis

The conclusion of the narrative resolves the difficulties and barriers to Rochester. The fire that destroys Thornfield is the act of Bertha, and it destroys her: when she is free to marry again. However, Rochester is 'crippled' by the devastation of Thornfield: 'blind', and a 'cripple', his horse is killed by a falling beam. This development is important for the more equal relationship between these two strong characters. There is something about Rochester becoming more dependent upon Jane, physically. Brontë has already established their relationship from the start (recall Jane's help of Rochester onto his horse, and later the burning bedroom).

In Chapter 37 Jane hastens to Ferndean – a decaying house in a gloomy wood – away from the grandeur of his 'seat', and physically diminished, the power balance has shifted in herself to him; he cannot see her, but recognises her touch and her voice. What is it about her 'spirit' and character – not their physical looks or material trappings. Jane tells him to stay away from him. She tries to make him angry and jealous with talking of St John, but he is revealing the truth.

Romanticism:

Nineteenth-century literary movement which valued strong emotion, and the feelings explored in the supernatural.

Rochester proposes again, Jane accepts, on the condition that there is greater equality between them, this is 'you better now, when I can really be useful to you, when you were proud independence, when you disdained every protector' (Ch. 37). Her relationship with him is now different from St John; Jane claims perfect harmony between them.

There was no harassing restraint, no repressing of glee and vivacity with him, but perfect ease, because I knew I suited him; all I said or did seemed either to console or revive him. Delightful consciousness! (Ch. 37)

A supernatural power has hastened and endowed their reunion: Rochester describes how he had called out her name aloud, and prayed for her in his physical and spiritual longing for her. Jane chooses not to tell him how she too has had the same experience at the same hour, however, the reader is aware of it. Brontë is drawing upon the literary language and motifs of Romanticism, by describing the experience of kindred souls in communion with each other.

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In the last chapter, Rochester and Jane are married. Like Jane, Rochester too has had to change his attitude, particularly on marriage and morality. It is important that their relationship is built on them both having matured and overcome their deficiencies to Jane; his repentance is crucial for the morality of their relationship. While there is some ambiguity in the narrative, it is clear that he has been judged by God.

I would have sullied my innocent flower – breathe, my flower, breathe! The omnipotent snatched it from me [...] Divine justice has visited me: disasters came thick upon me: I was forced to pass through the shadow of death. (Ch. 37)

The story finishes 10 years into Jane's marriage, and it's fertile and healing. Edward has recovered sight completely, and they have a son together. Jane describes her life as profoundly fulfilling. 'No man was ever nearer to her mate than I am to my husband: his bone and flesh comfort me: I know no weariness of my Edward's society: he knows me as I am, and loves me so.'



Exam practice

The novel explores the subject of marriage. Evaluate the ways in which the novel explores marriage.

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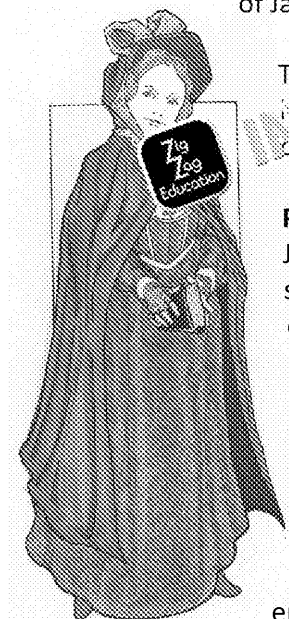


Characterisation

Characterisation: the techniques used by the writer to develop the sense of a coherent, believable, character. The writer uses description, action, speech and dialogue with the aim to develop a character.

Jane Eyre

The whole novel is told by the eponymous, first-person narrator. From the novel we can deduce that this story will be primarily about the life of that character. The story is told solely from her point of view, therefore it is personal, subjective account of Jane's experiences.



The story is told by Jane Eyre as a grown-up woman – an adult looking back on her past, including her childhood. From this retrospective perspective, she observes the differences between her child self and her adult self.

Poor orphan

Jane's identity as an orphan is central to Brontë's portrayal of her spiritual journey. At the beginning of the novel, in the first chapter, Jane is introduced as a poor orphan, friendless, unloved, and tormented by her cruel relatives. This establishes her as a typical fairy-tale character, such as Cinderella or Snow White. Like Cinderella or Snow White, Jane is forced to leave 'home' and make new, more loving and prosperous relationships.

Because she is an orphan, Jane seeks familial and emotional connection in the form of 'family', throughout the novel. When she discovers that the Rivers are in fact her cousins through the Eyre family, she expresses her satisfaction: 'It seemed I had found a brother: one I could be proud of – one I could rely on – one who was wealth indeed! – wealth to the heart! – a mine of pure, genial affections' (Ch. 10).

She tells St John that he cannot, 'at all imagine the craving I have for fraternal affection. At home, I never had brothers or sisters' (Ch. 33). As a consequence of discovering her true family, she settles her new fortune equally upon herself and her family.

Imaginative dreamer

Despite her understanding of the realities of economic life, Jane is also a daydreamer. In several passages Jane describes her daydreams and fantasies, which she refers to as her night-time dreams. She learns of the significance for her of reading books: her pleasure and inspiration in the magic of the stories in the *Arabian Nights*, which suggest the possibilities of the imagination. She also paints imaginative pictures, which express her depth of feelings and her desire for a better life.

Passionate

The outcome of her events and the quality of her relationships are decided by Jane's personality. As she reaches mature womanhood, Jane must learn to control her temper. One of her key challenges is to balance her 'fiery' and rebellious nature with a calmer, reflective, more rational nature. Her carefully expressed feelings and instincts are one of her strongest and sympathetic qualities. Brontë develops this aspect of Jane's personality through symbolic imagery.

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Activity

Identify some points in the text where Jane learns to control her passion. What imagery is used to express these – why?

Clue: try to find examples of fire, heat and light.

Independent and resourceful

Jane seeks closeness and openness with those she respects and loves, yet she also values her independence of her character and her identity. As a lover, Jane wishes to remain independent, and avoid being dressed up and treated like a prized possession. She tells Mr Rochester that she will be a governess for Adele after she is married. Her education and training is important to her, and she wants to live on her own living and thus live independently.

Moral principles

Jane's moral beliefs and principles are very important to her character. She has a strong belief in the importance of fairness and justice even as a child, and she maintains and upholds her values throughout the narrative. For example, she unselfishly shares her new fortune equally with her cousins, the Rivers. She forgives her Aunt Reed's cruelty and deception toward her when she was a child. It is her morality that stops her from becoming Rochester's 'mistress'. When she learns of his existing marriage, Jane decides to leave Rochester, even though he suggests that they live in France where their unmarried status would not be known. For Jane, she must 'keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man [...] Laws and principles are not for times when there is no temptation such as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour' (Ch. 27).

Key quotations:

- *I was left there alone – winner of the field. It was the hardest battle I had ever fought, and the victory I had gained [...] a ridge of lighted heath, alive, glancing, devouring, emblem of my mind when I accused and menaced Mrs Reed; the same ridge, when the flames are dead, would have represented as meetly my subsequent calm. My hour's silence and reflection had shown me the madness of my conduct, my pride, my hatred and hating position. (Ch. 4)*
- *Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? – I have as much soul as you – and full as much heart! And if God will, I shall have as much beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me as it is for me to leave you [...] I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, even of mortal flesh: it is my spirit that addresses your spirit [...] equal – as*
- *It was my time to assume ascendancy. My powers were in play and in force. I had no question or remark; I desired him to leave me, and I must and would be alone. Where there is energy to command, obedience never fails. I locked myself in; fell on my knees, and prayed in my way – a different way from that in which I had prayed in its own fashion. (Ch. 27)*



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Helen Burns

Helen Burns is a pupil at Lowood School, a red-haired, older girl who becomes a friend of Jane Eyre despite their differences in personality. Like Jane she enjoys reading and is imaginative.

Submissive

Jane cannot agree with or share in Helen's belief in forgiveness and her calm view of life, which she has gained from her reading of the Bible. Helen's character forms a strong contrast with Jane's: where Helen is patient and submissive, Jane is impatient, passionate and rebellious against authority and injustice. Helen is frequently punished, despite being a good student, because she is messy and forgetful. Jane grows to love and care about Helen through their loving relationship, and significantly one outside of her family. She cannot emulate Helen's example, and recognises their essential differences in personality. Jane admits: 'I cannot comprehend this doctrine of endurance; and still I should understand or sympathise with the forbearance she expressed for her persecutors. Still I felt that Helen Burns considered herself as being by a light invisible to my eyes' (Ch. 6).

Spiritual

Helen possesses an ideal, almost impossible, spirituality because it cannot exist in the cruel world of powerful and abusive adults around her. Her surname is a characterisation of her burning religious passion. She is so resigned to the injustice of life, she comes to accept death from tuberculosis because of her strong belief in the afterlife. She is reassured by the prospect of death; to Helen, her death is a release from suffering.

Key quotations:

- *God waits only a separation of spirit from flesh to crown us with a full reward. How can we sink overwhelmed with distress, when life is so soon over, and death is so near? Is not happiness – to glory? (Ch. 8)*
- *Hush, Jane! You think too much of the love of human beings; you are too fond of them. (Ch. 8)*
- *By dying young I shall escape great sufferings (Ch. 9)*

Miss Maria Temple

Miss Temple is a kind and caring teacher at Lowood School. Her education and her gentle, generous manner make her a female role model to Jane, and to Helen:

Miss Temple had always something of serenity in her air, of state in her manner, of precision in her language, which precluded deviation in to the ardent, the excited, the eager, the impetuous, the pleasure of those who looked on her, and listened to her, by a controlling influence.

But she is not entirely a strong character, and she lacks the strength of character to stand up to injustice. Despite her kindness to the pupils, Miss Temple cannot entirely protect them from the harshness of authority. Jane observes that she has become as passive as stone before her employer:

Miss Temple had been a woman when he first began to speak to her; but now she was a statue. Her face, naturally pale as marble, appeared to be assuming also the features of that material; especially her mouth, closed as if she would have required a key to open it, and her brow settled gradually into petrified severity (Ch. 7).

Brontë does not tell us that Jane judges Miss Temple as being impassive, instead she suggests that Brocklehurst's sermons have the effect of making her appear as still and unmoving. Unlike Jane who is passionate about challenging authority and those who misuse it, Miss Temple is passive.

Key Quotation:

- *We shall think you what you prove yourself to be, my child. Continue to do as you are, and we will satisfy us. (Ch. 8)*

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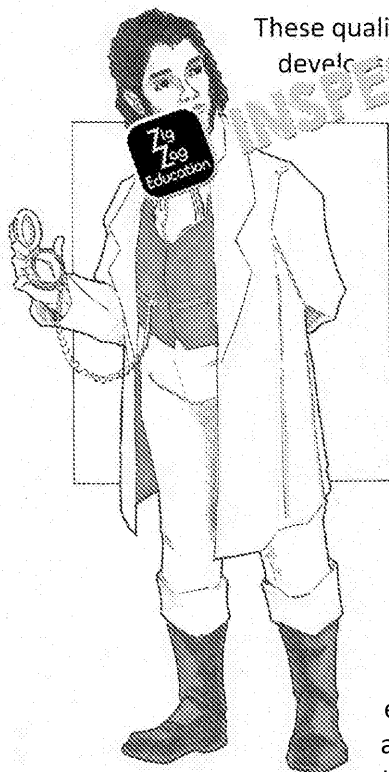
Edward Fairfax Rochester

Byronic good looks

Rochester is twenty years Jane's senior, he is 38 when they meet; his age and physical looks are an important guide to his character. Like the scandalous Romantic writer Lord Byron, he is unconventionally attractive, dark-haired, and strong:

... his broad and jetty eyebrows, his square forehead, made squarer by the horizontal sweep of his black hair. [...] decisive nose, more remarkable than his full nostrils, denoting, I thought choler; his grim mouth, chin, and jaw [...] harmonized with his physiognomy. I suppose it was a good figure in the athletic broad-chested and thin-flanked, though neither tall nor graceful (Ch. 13)

These qualities are all significant for the nature of the romance that will develop with Jane which will also be unconventional.



Wealth and power

Rochester comes in to a large fortune on marrying the Creole heiress Bertha Mason, a plantation owner's daughter in the West Indies. On the death of his brother and father, Edward inherits Thornfield. Edward is used to his wealth giving him some control when he meets Jane and overturn this. Despite his wealthy trapped marriage to Bertha Mason.

Secret past

In creating the character of Rochester, Brontë uses elements of the Gothic. Like a Gothic hero, Rochester is full of secrets: his romance with a French mistress, Céline, and her daughter, Adele. His hidden past controls his happiness, especially when it prevents him from marrying Jane. He appears mysterious, sometimes disappearing from the scene. In Chapter 18 Rochester disguises himself as an

anonymous character, to be close to Jane and to try her confidence, but she does not admit her feelings for him.

Edward has a secret marriage to Bertha Mason; this is presented as a romantic and social mistake, which threatens to ruin and destroy him. He hides the 'monstrous' and 'mad' heiress Bertha Mason in Thornfield's attic.

Lover and husband: equal partner

Rochester's courtship of and marriage to Jane is unconventional, and their mutual recognition of each other's personality and individuality. Edward recognises and values Jane's intellect, reason, values, character, and youth. He is paradoxical; he teases and flirts, but admits that his desire for her is based on recognising what they have in common. "my bride is here," he said, drawing me to him, "because my equal is here, and

Key quotations:

- I could reform – I have strength enough for that – if – but where is the use? I am hampered, burdened cursed as I am? Besides, since happiness is irrevocably mine, I have no right to get pleasure out of life: and I will get it, cost what it may. (Ch. 14)*
- People talk of natural sympathies; I have heard of good genii: there are good ones, I am sure. My cherished preserver, good-night! (Ch. 15)*

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- *To live, for me, Jane, is to stand on a crater-crust which may crack and split.*
- *'My bride is here,' he said, drawing me to him, 'because my equal is here.'*
- *I am no better than the old lightning-struck chestnut tree in Thornfield or that ruin have to bid a budding woodbine cover its decay with freshness?*

Active Learning Tasks

1. Find out more about the heroes of the Gothic genre, which relate to this aspect of character. Consult the further reading suggestions in this guide; look in your textbook.
2. When and how does Brontë use the language of the Gothic to portray Rochester?

Bertha Mason

Bertha Mason is a Creole heiress who is married to Edward Rochester in Jamaica, in an arranged marriage. She has a little acquaintance with each other. When Rochester is introduced to Jane, he claims that Bertha's black mother was violent and an alcoholic, and that Bertha's immoral behaviour gradually turned into lunacy. In common with mid-Victorian ideas about insanity, Rochester describes Bertha's madness as a family trait.



Victorian society generally viewed people of various ethnicities as different 'races' and white Europeans as having higher abilities than others. In the nineteenth century, Bertha's racial identity – as a 'Creole' with a black mother – was an 'opposite' to Jane because she was a white Englishwoman.

Brontë portrays her as a 'madwoman', her character is described as:

Whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, distinguish between her and the brute creation: she seemed downright wild, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some savage hyena or wild cat; but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face [...] the clothed hyena rose up, and stood tall on its hind-feet (Ch. 26).

Jane the narrator describes Bertha for us; she is given no speech in the story, her voice is only always inarticulate noise. Therefore the reader never hears from Bertha herself her own origins, or her story; her character is created through her relationship with Rochester and with Jane – she cannot give her own account of herself.

Although her actions are wordless, we could question whether this always means being *only* like an animal, or whether her actions are even more powerful and symbolic. Consider when she appears to Jane and Rochester, destroying her wedding veil: 'it rent it in two parts, and fell on the floor, trampled on them' (Ch. 26).

Discuss

*How is this a symbolic act?
And is it more emotionally charged than words might be at this point?*

Monstrous

Bertha's character is not portrayed realistically in the Gothic to create a supernatural figure, sometimes a monster:

I know not what dress she had on: it was white or yellow, gown, sheet or shroud, I cannot tell [...] it was a discoloured face – it was a face of a corpse, the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments! [...] the brow furrowed: the black eyebrows widely raised over the bloodshot eyes 'German spectre – the vampire' (Ch.25).

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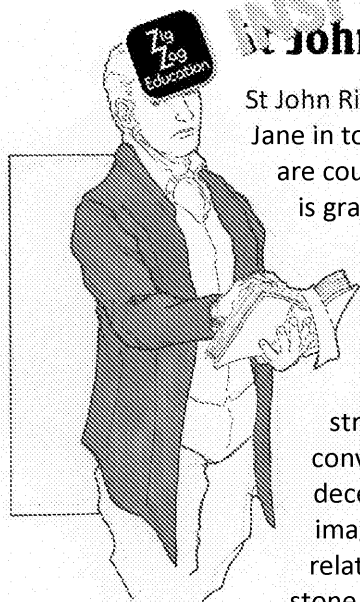


Like a vampire, after wounding her brother, Richard, she sucks his blood. She is the Gothic can act as the monstrous or animal side of ourselves. Bertha haunts Rochester she is the unacceptable secret and sexual shame that he must hide away from the other self which expresses the socially unacceptable – rage, anger, passion become nature is clearly shown as lunacy; in contrast, Jane's passionate nature is considered gains control of her strong feelings.

This characterisation of Bertha as a double for Jane is developed through the images which they share. Bertha is associated with fire: first she sets fire to Rochester's bed too is Jane associated with fire: her passionate temper and her rage are seen as fire.

Key quotations:

- *The clothed hyena rose up, and stood tall on its hind-legs [...] She was a brute almost equalling her husband, and crouching besides: she showed virile force*



St John Rivers

St John Rivers is a young, handsome clergyman, who takes Jane in to live with his sisters. Later, they discover that they are cousins. He is initially portrayed as noble and kind, but is gradually revealed to be controlling and destructive.

His characterisation is created through his extreme contrast to Edward Rochester. St John is pale, fair, young, and slim; his physical appearance is very handsome in a classical way. Brontë suggests conventional by comparing him to a Greek statue: straight, classic nose; quite an Athenian mouth and conventional, unlike Rochester, he will not be attractive or deceptive, his good looks do not mean he has a good nature. The imagery of statuary to indicate something about St John's relationship develops, Jane learns that St John is cold, like stone of a sculpture.

Christian Preacher and Missionary

St John's Christianity is evangelical, and Calvinist in his doctrines. In this, he is compared to the threatening, abusive preacher, Mr Brocklehurst, also a Calvinist. Like the owner of Lowood School, St John believes in a punishing God and threatens his congregation with damnation and a burning hell for disbelievers: 'the fearful, the unbelieving... shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death' (Ch. 35). His intended missionary work demonstrates his ambition, need for personal achievement, and control over others. St John is despotic in his effort to subdue and control Jane. Brontë uses the same imagery to describe qualities of Brocklehurst and St John's characters; he becomes like Brocklehurst: 'a column' – rigid and inflexible in nature. And like Brocklehurst he seeks to make Jane submit to his will, in his case, to make her marry him.

Ambitious, cold and rational

St John admits to Jane that he is 'a cold, hard, ambitious man'. He is controlled by 'rationality' not feeling: this, for Brontë, is a failing. This makes him an unbalanced character, unlike Jane who achieves a balance in her character between rationality and passionate feelings, and puts relationships before worldly ambition.

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St John falls in love with Rosamond Oliver, but makes the decision not to propose to her because he needs a wife, rather than on his romantic and emotional feelings. Instead, he proposes to Jane. His proposal to Jane is based upon his recognition of her abilities as an aide to his work, and her need for control. He has no romantic or sexual love towards her, and he concludes, 'I can influence efficiently in life, and retain absolutely till death' (Ch. 34). Because Jane can do for him and what he can make use of, he is a 'double' for Rochester: they are opposites. Rochester wants Jane for herself, and is her match in spirit. This is reflected in the contrast between fire and ice for Rochester. Fire symbolises passion and is associated with Jane, and ice symbolises destructive and negative rationality and lack of feeling.

Key quotations:

- *Reason, and not feeling, is my guide: my ambition is unlimited; my desires are more than others, insatiable. I honour endurance, perseverance, industry, talent.* (Ch. 34)
- *While I love Rosamond Oliver, I am conscious of the same time of the consciousness that she should not make me a good wife; that she is not the person that I would wish to be within a year later marriage; and that to twelve months I shall have a life of regret. This I know. (Ch. 32)*
- *Do you think God will be satisfied with half an oblation? Will He accept a sacrifice for the cause of God I advocate: it is under his standard I enlist you. I cannot be divided allegiance; it must be entire. (Ch. 34)*

Mr Brocklehurst

Mr Brocklehurst is a Christian missionary and the owner of Lowood School. Brontë portrays his doctrines of his religion as cruel and controlling. He threatens his wards with the judgment of God, who would judge their actions. He describes vivid visions of hell if the children disobey, a rhetorical question: 'Should you like to fall into that pit, and to be burning there?' (Ch. 7)

Brontë shows that he is a hypocrite of the cruellest kind, through a passage in which she contrasts between the treatment of his own family and of the poor and vulnerable pupils at Lowood. Brocklehurst that the orphan girls are made to feel socially inferior.

The descriptions of Brocklehurst depict him more as a statue of stone than a human being with whom he can be compared, Brocklehurst's stony rigidity symbolises his inflexibility and lack of warmth and feeling: 'the same black column which had frowned on me so ominously on Gateshead'. He is also described as 'the black marble clergyman'.

Key quotations:

- *All liars will have their portion in the lake burning with fire and brimstone.* (Ch. 7)
- *God has given her the shape that He has given to all of us; no single deformity, no marked character. Who would have thought that the Evil One had already found her? Yet such, I grieve to say, is the case. (Ch. 7)*



Exam practice

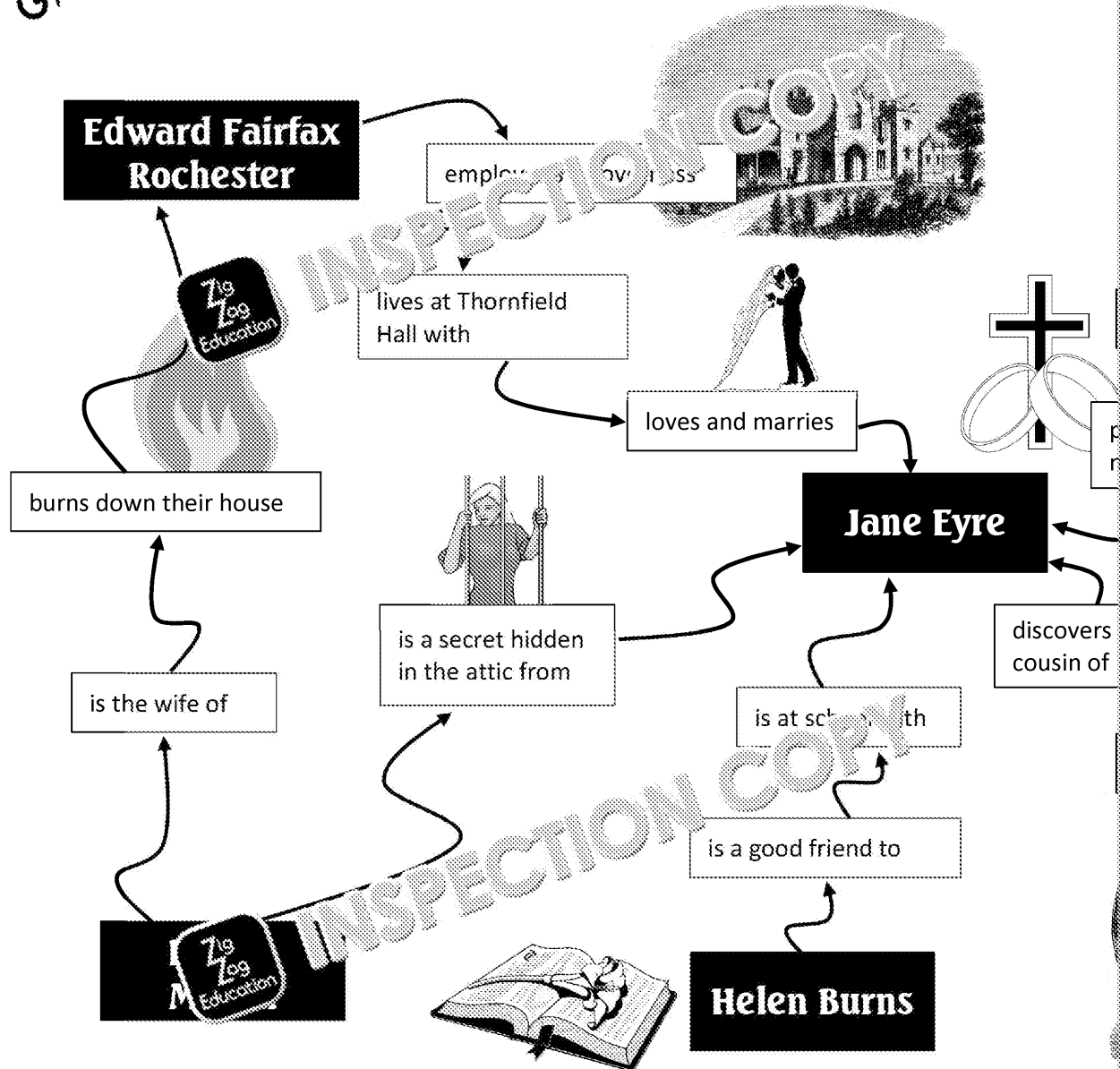
Explore how Brontë portrays her characters' social positions.

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Key Relationships



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Relationships Analyses

Edward Fairfax Rochester and Jane Eyre

Jane and Rochester's relationship is unconventional throughout the narrative, that they are not social equals. Their relationship develops over time and must overcome obstacles to become a partnership of equality at the end of the narrative. Rochester's love for Jane, and their love for each other, they do not marry until his first wife is dead.

The **literal** level of the narrative is what happens in fact.

Jane and Rochester's relationship is characterised by which draws upon fairy tales in terms of imagery, structure. Rochester describes himself as being 'bewitched' by Jane. At the end of the novel, Brontë brings them together by a supernatural bond.

Brontë questions conventional power relationships in gender and class, seeking to emphasise the importance of equality in marriage between those who are not equal in social class status. When they are reunited at the end of the narrative, Rochester is blinded and maimed on a literal level. But on a symbolic level, he is now able to 'see' more clearly and is stronger: he is morally and spiritually more powerful than before when he was master of Thornfield Hall, and Jane. With Rochester's physical disabilities and loss of property, without the role of master, marriage begins on a more equal footing. Jane describes their exclusive relationship as a connection of soulmates: *'To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, to talk to each other is but a more animated and audible thinking.'*

Exam practice

How does Brontë present Rochester and Jane's relationship in the novel?

Helen Burns and Maria Temple

The friendships Jane has with Helen and Miss Temple at Lowood are formative and crucial to her need for loving relationships. Miss Temple is a role model, mother figure, and 'shrine of lady-like virtues' for Jane while at Lowood School, caring for her, teaching and inspiring her. But when she leaves to be married, Jane reverts to some of her old ways and views.

While Jane respects and comes to love Helen, she does not, and cannot forgive others as she does, or be accepting of her suffering. Their relationship is one of encouragement and support to one another, but the girls have very different natures.

Jane and Bertha Mason

Despite their outward differences, Jane and Bertha have an interconnected relationship on a symbolic level – both women are married to, and live with, Mr Rochester – a symbolic level in the novel. This idea of parallels, or doubling, is to be found structurally and through shared imagery (see Characterisation section). Both women have strong, passionate feelings which they act upon. But Jane's passionate anger is rational and directed against what she feels are personal wrongs. In contrast to Jane, Bertha seems irrational, and commits destructive acts of madness. For example, she burns Rochester's bedroom, wounds Richard Mason, her brother, and eventually burns herself. When Jane is pacing the corridors of Thornfield, feeling trapped and restless, she hears her moans. Bertha's acts and appearances coincide with the expression of Jane's repressed feelings about her impending marriage. Bertha visits Jane's room the night before the wedding is to take place, and Jane removes her wedding veil: a destructive action which might express Jane's feeling about the veil.

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Exam tip...

When answering a question about relationships, you are required to use different writing skills (based on knowledge of the whole novel), as well as analyse and evaluate (based on knowledge of the text).

Jane and the Reeds

Jane's childhood relationships with those in the Reed family, her guardian Aunt Reed, Georgiana, John and Eliza, are unequal: she feels herself to be dependent upon her aunt, the widow of Jane's mother's brother; Uncle Reed was attached to Jane as a baby and was jealous, and like a fairy-tale stepmother, always mistreated Jane, resented and

Jane was unhappy, misunderstood, and

Discuss...

With a partner, explain to each other how Georgiana and Eliza's fate might reflect Victorian middle-class women's life choices.

Her cousins do not respect Jane; John to develop a strong sense of injustice from her treatment, and her aunt's toleration of his behaviour shown ultimately to result in the breakdown of the young man, John becomes a gambler and

degraded'. Jane is valued for her beauty as a child, Georgiana becomes preoccupied with her 'marriage' as an adult. The spoilt and selfish Eliza becomes dogmatically religious woman. Neither sister grieves deeply when their mother dies, and they separate further relationship with them.

Jane and the Riverses

Jane lives for a time with siblings who she later discovers to be her cousins: Diana, Mary, and St John. Diana, the older sister, is 'a superior and a leader' (Ch. 30). She is an ideal of strong femininity for Jane: an independent, working woman who enjoys intellectual pursuits of languages and reading. Diana sides with Jane in her rejection of St John's marriage proposal, and is

Did you know?

Mary's name refers to the religious icon, Jesus' mother.

Mary Rivers is also a model of good womanhood for Jane. Like Jane, Mary is a governess; both learn to take lessons: and a docile, intelligent, assiduous worker she made' (Ch. 30). Jane finds mature and rewarding friendship with these women,

based on a sense of equality and later, knowledge of their kinship:

I could join with Diana and Mary in all their occupations; converse with them as much as they wished and aid them where they allowed me. There was a reviving pleasure in this intercourse, of a kind now tasted by me for the first time – the pleasure arising from perfect congeniality of tastes, sentiments, and principles (Ch. 30).

Active Learning Task
Evaluate and discuss the marriage of Jane and St John.

Active Learning Task

Evaluate and discuss the marriage of Jane and St John as a disaster for Jane.

Jane's relationship with clergyman St John Rivers is initially little interested in Jane beyond a sense of duty. However, St John comes to recognise Jane's qualities: her selfless ambition is combined with selfishness and begins to control Jane: he asks her to stop learning and to marry him. He proposes to Jane that she marry him on his missionary work. Jane offers to accompany him, but

knows that their natures are very different, and that the marriage would be a loveless arrangement.

Brontë is critical of the social conventions of her time, she wishes to show that this is an unhealthy and unhappy model for marriage: Jane finally rejects St John when she sees how such an arrangement would destroy her happiness.

Discuss

1. In what ways does Jane's relationship with St John Rivers reflect the social conventions of her time?
2. Why does Jane reject St John's proposal?

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Settings

In the novel, settings of place and time are central to the structure of Jane's story. Her narrative are very connected to physical places, and specifically to only six primary buildings. These are Gateshead, Lowood School, Thornfield Hall, Moor House (Moor House), Ferndean. Further, Brontë has chosen names for these houses and places which reflect the mood of this phase of Jane's life will be.

Gateshead

Gateshead House belongs to the Reed family. It is where Jane begins her life's journey and 'head' – suggest a starting place. A gate may 'lead' all the way found on the beginning of Jane's path through life.

Gateshead is a large manor house and Jane does not lack comfort in her beautiful surroundings. However, despite the conveniences and physical provisions, Jane is unfortunately ill-treated. In this setting, Jane experiences hardship and suffering of a psychological nature.

Gateshead: the red-room

The setting for Jane's fits and faint is the 'red-room' in the Gateshead house. Despite the wealth and order of the rest of the house, this room is treated as a Gothic setting. It has the function of a prison, confining Jane as a punishment, in common with the prisons and cells of Gothic fiction.

Discuss...

With a partner, discuss what the colour red symbolises. What emotions is it associated with?

It was a death chamber: Jane knows that it is. Jane, fearful and sensitive, imagines her unlit room is all decorated in red, the colour of blood, but just as blood is associated with death, it is also associated with life. As a setting for a rite of passage

the ending – or death – of part of Jane's childhood, and the next, new stage of life.



Extended essay question

Explore how Brontë makes the scene in the red-room dramatic and

Lowood School

The name of this place also indicates something of its relationship to the main character. It is largely a 'low' time for Jane, while 'wood' may also suggest the symbolic fairy-tale setting of a wood which the heroine must find her way through, and escape from.

The setting of the orphanage, and institution, is important to address some of Brontë's themes and ideas about power and religion. The orphanage is owned and run by Mr Brocklehurst, a hypocritical and cruel religious zealot. It also allows Brontë to address the theme of inequality and the abuses of power that occur between those in power, and the powerless: orphan children. Brontë has the institution reformed and regulated through a change of management after the tuberculosis outbreak, and therefore perhaps suggests that needful social reform of such institutions is possible.

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Thornfield Hall

There are almost 16 chapters of the narrative in which Jane resides at Thornfield, place settings, which indicates the significance of this time and place in her life. It suggests something of the emotional experience that Jane will have while living in the suggestion of pain: thorns which prick and hurt, and perhaps also of productivity and flourish. Jane experiences emotional growth through her relationship with Rochester and begins to mature into a young woman.

Thornfield: Gothic

Brontë chooses to make of Thornfield Hall a Gothic setting. In the genre of Gothic literature, settings are very important to establishing atmosphere and mood. Typically these would be haunted houses and castles, usually either set in, or relating to, the late medieval period (1400s–1500s). The mansion of Thornfield is more realistic than the castles of earlier Gothic fiction, but it does use its motifs. In the Gothic, physical places often correspond to places in the psyche – or mind – e.g. hidden passages, dungeons, cellars or attics are where a secret is kept, usually of a sinister or disturbing nature. Thornfield is a large, old mansion, and is a haunted place. In creating a Gothic setting, Brontë reinforces a sense of mystery that is not to be revealed to be supernatural.

In particular, the way in which the attic is presented conforms to the conventions upon the folk tale of Bluebeard in his castle, who kills each of his wives and hides their bodies in a chamber. The attic of Thornfield has 'two rows of small black doors, all shut, like a castle' (Ch. 11). This reference to the fairy tale alerts the reader to a secret hidden away that Rochester may not be who he seems to be. Of course, this is where Bertha Mason is kept concealed. She haunts the corridors like a ghost, moaning and laughing in a way that threatens Rochester.



Exam practice

Explore how Brontë creates suspense and fear in Chapter 11, and elsewhere.

Thornfield: the orchard and chestnut tree

The orchard and garden of Thornfield during the spring and early summertime for Jane are full of life. The trees of the orchard may be symbolic of the apple eaten by Eve and the unfolding of Eden, when Eve is tempted into sexual experience with Adam. The summertime is a time of youthful womanhood in Jane's life, a time of emotional and physical blossoming. It is also a time of the blossoming relationship between Jane and Rochester. They declare their love on Midsummer's Eve, with its scents of 'Sweet-briar, and southernwood, jasmine, peonies, and ripening fruit'.

The chestnut tree is an important symbol of their relationship which Brontë also draws from the natural world, suggesting the slow growth of their union. It is here where the lovers admit their feelings of love for each other. They first sit as a couple at the foot of the chestnut, circled at the base by a seat' (Ch. 23); Jane confesses her feelings to Rochester, and he then proposes. Brontë uses the technique of the objective correlative; it becomes symbolic of their troubled relationship. When there is a storm, there is a storm, and it is 'struck by lightning in the night, and half of it split down the trunk, nearly destroyed in the storm, it is later shown to have survived and to still be growing'.

the trunk, split down the centre, gasped ghastly. The cloven halves were not for the firm base and strong roots kept them sundered below; though completely destroyed [...] however they might be said to form one tree – a ruin, but arranged right to hold fast to each other; I said; as if the monster splinters were living me. [...] the time of pleasure and love is over with you; but you are not desirous of comrade to sympathise with him in his decay. (Ch. 25)

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Likewise, although Jane leaves Rochester with knowledge of his marriage to Bertha, she does not know how to act on this knowledge. She must wait until she can return to him again and be reconciled.

When having left St John, Jane finds Rochester at Ferndean; Rochester humbly listens to her when she considers his right to having a relationship with Jane:

I am no better than the old lightning-struck chestnut tree in Thornfield orchard. What chance have I, that ruin have to bid a budding woodbine cover its decay with freshness?' 'You are no ruin, sir – no lightning-struck tree: you are green and vigorous (Ch. 38)

Moor House, Marsh End

From the place name of Marsh End we might conclude that Jane will have further difficulties succeeding on her journey: the ground of a 'marsh' is unstable and literally 'dead' in that it is a 'dead end': she cannot stay there and it is the place which is associated with her possible marriage with St John Rivers.

Moor House is the home of her cousins, the Rivers. Moor House does seem to offer Jane a female friend and support during her time with Diana and Mary Rivers there. Jane stays at Moor House until she becomes a teacher and administrator at the village school. She is forced to leave the community when she realises how controlling and damaging Mr. Rivers would become, and she is ready to seek Rochester.

Ferndean

Ferndean is the somewhat decayed home which Rochester is living in, after Thornfield. This is where Jane finds him at the end of the narrative, and they make a home again.

A fern is a plant, and is growing and living; an appropriate image from Nature for Rochester and Jane and their future life together. The house Ferndean does not fit the managed estate, Thornfield: Jane observes that 'there were no flowers, no garden like in its setting, it is 'set in the heavy frame of the forest'. It is separate from the world from anyone else, leaving the lovers happily secluded in their own world.

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Themes, Ideas and Messages

Themes

Themes are repetitive and thus have the effect of linking the ideas in the story together, creating a sense of a broader or deeper idea or concept. Themes can be explored through characters, events, and incorporated into the structure of the novel.

Ideas and messages are broader concepts which underpin themes.

Marriage

At the centre of this novel is the theme of marriage and it is closely bound up with dependency and identity. There are three marriages principally explored in this novel: Rochester's marriage to Bertha Mason, his proposed marriage to the wealthy socialite Blanche Ingram, and his proposed marriage to Jane. It is through these marriages that the central relationship between Rochester and Jane forms its meaning.

As twenty-first century readers, we may view marriage particularly from romantic or emotional perspectives; but as has been discussed in 'Social and Cultural Contexts', marriage was an important and very practical one to men and women in the nineteenth century, but perhaps especially to women. With each kind of marriage, Brontë prompts the reader to ask questions about the nature of marriage and what makes a 'good' marriage. For Brontë, this is a question which is underpinned by ideas about class and gender roles. She explores these ideas and values through her treatment of each of the proposed marriages.

Marriage for money and social status: Bertha Mason and Blanche Ingram

Rochester's marriage to the heiress Bertha Mason, a wealthy plantation owner's daughter, is one in which he would gain a large fortune, particularly as he would not inherit his father's wealth. In the nineteenth century inheritance traditionally went to the eldest son. Brontë presents Rochester as having married Bertha for her wealth without knowing her and her family background, largely misguided and naïve.

Discuss...

1. What role does the 'intended' marriage to Blanche Ingram play in the structure of the plot?
2. What themes and ideas does it explore?
3. What does it tell us about Rochester and Jane's values for marriage?

On the death of his brother and father, Rochester inherits a large fortune and increases his wealth and social status. This makes him a good marriage prospect to the Ingrams: Blanche Ingram, attracted by his wealth, wants to marry him. However, Brontë shows Rochester as arrogant and cynical in his pursuit of Rochester. Blanche Ingram is not respectful of her. Such a marriage is based on mutual disrespect and

Incompatible marriages

Brontë considers the issue of incompatible marriages and the effect that they would have on the fulfilment of the couple. Through the character of St John and his attraction to Rosamond Oliver, the author can show us something of the way in which St John bases his marriage upon practical considerations of his personal ambitions, rather than romantic feelings. St John confides in Jane that 'while I love Rosamond Oliver so wildly [...] I experience at the same time the consciousness that she would not make me a good wife; that she is not the partner I require. I discover this within a year later marriage' (Ch. 32). For him, a wife should be someone who can help and help him achieve it: he does not seek an equal partner, but a tool for his use.

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Jane experiences a growing realisation of the vast gulf of difference between St John and her own. When Jane makes the Marsh End house cheerful for her cousins' return, it is of interest; this illustrates their differences in attitude toward domesticity and family: 'The humanities and amenities of life had no attraction for him – its peaceful enjoyments no charm. As I looked at his lofty forehead, still and pale as a white stone [...] I comprehended all at once that he would hardly make a good husband – that is: it would be a trying thing to be his wife' (Ch. 34). Ultimately, Jane realises to be a wife to St John would actually mean degradation: 'can I receive from him the bridal ring, endure all the forms of love (which I doubt not he would scrupulously observe) and know that the spirit which is absent? [...] such a martyrdom would be too great for me. I will never undergo it'. Brontë does not shy away from suggesting the misery and even violence that might arise from such a marriage, in which Jane would be obliged to have a sexual union with a man that has been a common arrangement in the contemporary society.

Discuss...

In a small group, discuss the following quotation from Jane Eyre:

'(He) has no more of the softness of a woman than that foaming gulf stream is foaming to me as a soldier to a woman that is all.' (Ch. 34)

- ❖ Who is she referring to?
- ❖ What does she mean by 'the language of the senses'?

A marriage of equals

All the other marriages in the novel illuminate what an ideal marriage would be. Jane's marriage informs the structure of the plot, and the ideal partnership of Jane and Rochester informs the narrative. Rochester has told Jane of three of his former mistresses – women who were married to Bertha Mason. However, he has over time realised that such arrangements are based upon inequality, and are therefore demeaning. He concludes to Jane: 'hiring a woman to be my wife is a thing to buying a slave: both are often by inferior: and to live familiarly with inferior is a thing to which I am not inclined' (Ch. 24).

Active Learning Task

In pairs, take on a character – Jane, Rochester, Blanche or St John – and speak to each other, in character, about what you think marriage should be.

thing to buying a slave: both are often by inferior: and to live familiarly with inferior is a thing to which I am not inclined' (Ch. 24). Jane thinks about their marriage plans, she wants her financial independence from him; she wants to be in her employ for Rochester and be paid for her services: 'I shall be your English Céline Varens. I shall continue to be by that I shall earn my board and lodging besides' (Ch. 24).

In social terms, their relation to each other is unequal – he is the wealthy master and she is the poor governess. But both recognise that they are spiritual equals attracted to one another, which Jane claims, 'it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave and stood at God's feet equal, – as we are!' (Ch. 23). Rochester's desire for marriage with Jane is also expressed as a compatibility based upon sameness: 'my bride is here, because my equal is here, and my likeness' (Ch. 23).

Their equality and spiritual likeness is also apparent in the imagery associated with their characterisation: both see each other as possessing magical qualities – Rochester is associated with the 'green' and he sees Jane as a witch. These magical or supernatural qualities come to symbolise their attraction to each other.

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Self-identity and development

The theme of self-identity is central to the novel with its associated messages about integrity, personal morality and ethics. This theme shapes the narrative structure and form (*for more discussion, see 'Structure and Form'*). Throughout the novel, Jane reflects and acts upon her own values about what is the right way to behave toward others, and concerning herself. The decisions she must make are important. But it is through this process, that Jane develops her self-identity.

Jane's personal integrity is bound up in her moral beliefs – especially in the values of honesty and fairness. These values guide her actions and decisions about the choices she must make during the course of the narrative. For example, Brontë illustrates Jane's generosity and sense of justice, when without hesitation she shares her money with the poor. Jane inherited from her Uncle Eyre with her cousins, the Rivers. Brontë also shows the reader Jane's growth and development, when the maturing Jane is finally able to practise Christian

Active Learning

'It seemed as if that I had struggled [...] I was left [...] was the hardest victory I had gained.'

- ❖ Who is this?
- ❖ How does it relate to self-identity?
- ❖ What values does it represent?

Discuss...

Explore the language in this quotation and consider the implications. In a written summary, explain, in your own words, what Jane means here.

forgiveness: when her Aunt Reed is dying, she forgives her as a child.

Although her decision to leave Rochester is painful, Jane does not hesitate or question her choice. She goes to France together, where their unmarried status and her moral principles and her sense of how the world should be, forbid her from becoming Rochester's mistress.

Jane must 'keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man [...] Laws and principles are not to be trifled with: they are for moments such as this, when body and soul rise in mutiny against each other.'

Independence and dependence

Jane's quest is characterised by the search for a balance between dependency and independence. Throughout the novel, Brontë charts Jane's journey toward a happy and healthy interdependence based upon equality and mutual respect in her personal relationships: with peers at Lowood, friends and family relations, and finally in marriage. Jane seeks affinity and affiliation with those she respects and loves, yet also wishes to preserve the integrity of her character and identity, as has been discussed in relation to marriage.

Paid work is a central element in Jane's independence. It is vital to Jane that she work; she cannot and will not live with the Reeds, so she becomes a teacher, and then a governess. When her employment there, as it has been compromised by her romantic relationship with Rochester, she is lucky to find help from the Rivers, she goes on to find new employment as a teacher.

Jane achieves complete financial independence when she receives her inheritance. This may be considered to be an unlikely or unrealistic event to readers, however this is a key moment to explore how Jane's sense of the quality of the relationships Jane has – most significantly with the Rivers – is reflected in the fairy-tale or folk-tale elements of the plot, for example, Jane becomes a princess, or is literally showered with gold as reward for her kindness.



Exam practice

Explore how the themes of marriage and integrity feature in this speech by Jane: 'Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? No, sir, I am as soulful as you – and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some wealth and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I would not have called it my spirit that addresses your spirit [...] equal – as we are!'

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Ideas and Messages

Equality

Brontë looks at gender and social roles and identities in society and how they are at a disadvantage and suffer from inequality. Brontë develops a feminist voice through the character of Jane, who comments passionately upon her position as a woman. Jane's quest is characterised by the search for equality and mutual respect in her personal relationships, including family relations; with peers at Lowood; and in marriage.

Jane meets prejudice and unfair, unequal treatment as a result of her social position and lack of money. For example, the theme of inequality is explored through the role and social identity of governesses. One that Brontë herself explores is how they disrespect those of lower status. In *Jane Eyre*, the Governesses are a target for mockery from wealthy guests, including Blanche. In Ch. 17, Blanche makes remarks in Jane's hearing: 'I am a judge of all the faults of her class' (Ch. 17). Orphans who are particularly vulnerable in Brontë's society, and who do not experience equality.

Physiognomy is the study of facial features. In the nineteenth century, it was a common belief that character, and class, could be deduced from these.

Disrespect
Read the text and make a list of the ways in which the characters in the novel show disrespect to those of lower status.

Religion and power

Some religious institutions are exposed and criticised in *Jane Eyre* as a means to dominate and control others. Brontë satirises current Calvinist Christian thinking and practices for its cruelty, hypocrisy, lack of feeling, and is shown to operate in structures which especially dominate women, children and the poor.

Brontë's ideas about religion are also explored through some of the characters in the novel. St John illustrates these ideas through the two religious zealots, Brocklehurst and St John. To a lesser extent through Jane's cousin, Eliza Reed. Eliza withdraws from emotional relationships with others, and joins a Catholic nunnery.

Brocklehurst instructs that the girls at Lowood, especially the older ones, must have their hair cropped short and curls cut off: 'we are not to conform to nature'. Moments later, the Brocklehurst family arrive, dressed in fashionable, beautiful clothes, including 'light tresses, elaborately curled', Mrs Brocklehurst wearing 'a

false front of French curls' (Ch. 7). Religion is used as a weapon by Brocklehurst, to punish and subjugate children; he threatens them with an accusation of burning in hell if they do not become submissively to authority.

In St John's sermons, also, notes Jane, 'there is an absence of consolatory gentleness; stern election, predestination, reprobation – we

to these poor wretches sounded like a sentence pronounced for doom' (Ch. 30). His Calvinist religion is emotionally oppressive and controlling, and when he proposes to Jane and asks her to work in India, it is in God's name that he tries to manipulate her into marriage: 'Do you with half an oblation? Will He accept a mutilated sacrifice? It is the cause of God I standard I enlist you. I cannot accept on His behalf a divided allegiance: it must be

Active Learning Task

Summarise your understanding of what St John's beliefs are in the above quotation. Consider what these might mean for his relationship to Jane.

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Women's position in society

Brontë's discussion of gender includes consideration of the upbringing, occupations and interests of women at this time. Marriage and work are important aspects of women's position explored in this novel. Brontë's underlying messages and ideas about women's position in her society are that some women are disadvantaged and must struggle against prejudice and unfair treatment in order to succeed. Through the character of Jane, Brontë expounds her message that women have intellectual abilities and a need for self-expression, beyond marriage, and perhaps too, beyond motherhood. It is notable that this novel does not discuss or explore motherhood to any great extent, despite its importance to many women of this period, and the status and occupation that it gave them.



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Structure and Form

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Structure is the overall organisation, shape and patterns in the story, usually with reference to the chronology of events plotted by the writer.

Form refers more broadly to the novel's shape or design, for example, whether it is a first person narrative. Formal elements include the narrative voice, the inclusion and treatment of dialogue, and literary style.

Narrative voice

Jane Eyre is subtitled 'An Autobiography' to emphasise the attempt to tell a life story in the first person narrative voice. The story is therefore told in the first person narrative, that is, the speaker relates the events of the story.

Jane narrates the story retrospectively, that is, she is recollecting memories from the past. Her adult self narrates all of the story from the vantage point of knowing all that has happened to her; she describes most of the events in the past simple tense.

Brontë makes extensive use of the literary technique of dialogue between two or more characters throughout the novel. This technique is crucial to create and develop characterisation. But as characters speak, they can make good use of the present tense, as well as the full variety of the verb forms, creating a more vivid sense of immediacy, as if the characters are speaking in the present.

Discussion

1. What is the narrative voice?
2. At what point does the narrative voice change?

Generic elements

Bildungsroman form

The *Bildungsroman* is a literary form that follows the childhood and coming of age of the central character; traditionally it is a form about a male hero, this novel instead develops a female character. *Jane Eyre* is of the *Bildungsroman* form, because the story charts the moral and emotional growth of the protagonist, Jane, from a passionate child into a woman; her childhood is seen as fundamental to the whole of her identity and to her story, rather than being a separate or insignificant part. Brontë writes about childhood as an important part of identity and she writes realistically about feelings, emotions, and understanding of her world.

Spiritual journey

In common with the *Bildungsroman* form, *Jane Eyre* also borrows from the literary mythic quest-plot. The journey narrative is both literary and physical journey in which the protagonist learns, develops and grows emotionally, morally, and spiritually. A large part of Jane's journey is her spiritual journey, in which spiritual and sexual aspects of her character reach a climax.

Pilgrim's Progress (1633) by John Bunyan is an important literary text and Christian allegory. It is a spiritual journey. Brontë's novel comments upon the importance of the spiritual journey.

likewise, Jane sets out on a pilgrimage, but unlike Bunyan's pilgrim, Jane does not find a natural paradise in relationships of equality. Jane finds fulfilment of her own desires in the love of Rochester when she marries Rochester at the end of the novel.

Allegory: representation of a spiritual or other abstract idea or issue.

Jane's journey through childhood, girlhood, young womanhood, and maturity all takes place in symbolically named places. The narrative moves from one phase to the next stage, although some characters recur, in order to reflect upon some of the themes of the novel.

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Brontë incorporates a song form into the novel: the ballad. In Bessie's song of the orphan child, in Chapter 3, the ballad is narrated by the orphan on a pilgrimage, just as Jane is the narrator of the novel. The ballad is a prediction of Jane's experience on her journey: 'My feet they are sore, and my limbs they are weary; / Long is the way, and the mountains are wild; / Soon will the twilight close moonless and dreary / Over the path of the poor orphan child' (Ch. 3). Brontë highlights or underlines Jane's identity as a folk-tale heroine, an orphan child, and asks the reader to anticipate what might happen to her, such as the hardship she will have and how loneliness will be part of her journey.

Structure of the narrative

Physical place and the seasons are important as they structure the progress of Jane's life and place – the symbolism and imagery of these – will be used to develop the narrative discussion.

The structure of the narrative can be divided into distinct phases of Jane's childhood. The beginning is her early childhood with the Reeds at Gateshead; followed by her adolescence at Thornfield; maturity at Marsh End; and finally marriage at Ferndean. Brontë explored in the nature of the places that she lives, and the relationships that she has. Gateshead, and the new, Rivers cousins appear to be the antithesis – or opposite

Genre

Fairy and folk tales

Fairy-tale motifs such as in Grimm's 'Bluebeard' and 'Cinderella', characterise *Jane Eyre*. These feature structurally in the plot and through particular motifs, characterisation and relationships. In common with the quest structure and motifs of the folk tale, Jane is an innocent heroine, orphan, and outcast of the family; she is forced to go on a journey in which she becomes destitute and desperate; she lives with kind strangers. In common with folk and fairy tales, there is also the physical punishment and maiming of the villains (John and Aunt Reed die); finally the heroine is showered with gold (inheritance) and married. Another genre from which Brontë borrows, which has much in common with certain folk tales, particularly in what is supernatural, is the Gothic.

The Gothic

Generic elements of the Gothic are very significant for *Jane Eyre* and are integral to the novel. Presentation of the supernatural is the defining feature of the Gothic genre: ghostly figures. Bertha appears as a ghost to Jane. Mystery and anticipation, and the feelings of the characters and the reader are important to the development of the narrative.

In Chapter 25, Jane is haunted by the ghost of Mr. Rochester in Thornfield. Like a Gothic hero, Jane experiences terror: 'my heart beat anxiously, and my inward tranquillity was broken. [...] Just then I was touched: as if fingers had swept the panels in groping a way along the dark passage: "there?" No answer. I was chilled with fear' (Ch. 25).

Discuss...

What effect might Brontë intend this language have upon the reader?

Brontë explores the imagery of the supernatural in the figure of the ghostly, magical figure to Rochester. He describes her as a woman on his horse. Rochester is also presented as a supernatural figure in his encounter with him, when he comes riding through the night with the black dog. Jane describes him as looking like the devil, a figure from folklore.

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Imagery, motifs, symbols

Symbolism and imagery are fundamental to the narrative, providing an overall unity to the whole and linking together different sections of Jane's story. Elemental imagery drawn from Nature – that of fire and light; ice and rock – is fundamental in *Jane Eyre* to expressing character and character development; pairings of characters are compared and contrasted throughout. All the major characters are linked to these natural elements, and they express the overriding or ruling aspect of their character or personality. Fire, light, or lightning can illuminate or passion. But passion can also destroy, as fiery anger can when Jane rages at her uncle, fire, new growth can come, so Brontë may suggest that fire is even necessary to life. At Thornfield, Rochester is maimed but has an opportunity to develop and grow with

Jane's nature is represented by the imagery of fire and light – these signify aspects of her nature. However, Bertha Mason is also associated with fire, but the fire symbolises her passionate and violent temper.

The Moon is a symbol which links the two Mrs Rochesters, it has a supernatural quality, a signal when something of importance is going to happen. The Moon is personified as a female, maternal presence. As a mother figure it is a guiding light for Jane. The Moon is also a symbol which links the two Mrs Rochesters, it has a supernatural quality, a motif drawn from the Gothic. Moonlight is present in the story at significant events and also foretells and illuminates Bertha's acts of destruction.

Symbols are also important in the visions and dreams that foretell of events and define her identity. Her child self may be represented in the dream of the baby she is carrying, which also represent her budding relationship with or love for Rochester.



Exam practice

Consider how one or two of the characters are presented.

Tip: consider the use of symbols, motifs, and other imagery.

Brontë presents Jane's story as a journey. Explore the themes and plot of that journey.

Tip: explore the structure of the plot, and the themes of spiritual quest for independence.

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Social Context

Biographical Information

Charlotte Brontë was born on 21st April in 1816, in Thornton near Bradford in Yorkshire to an Irish clergyman Patrick Brontë and the Cornish Maria Branwell. Charlotte's siblings were Branwell, Emily, and Anne.

In 1820 the family moved to the remote Haworth Parsonage on the Yorkshire moors. When their mother died, aged 38. Their Aunt Elizabeth then moved in to the parsonage to care for the children. The surviving siblings had very close relationships with each other and with their father. Charlotte wrote and painted imaginatively together from a very young age; later the girls published their writing together.

Charlotte and her sisters received some education, both at home and by attending school for periods in their childhood; this was not typical for girls at this time. The oldest girls, Charlotte and Elizabeth, died during an outbreak of tuberculosis (TB) at school. The younger sisters were immediately removed from the school.

At the age of 19, Charlotte became a teacher at Roehead School. In 1839 she had a first job as a governess. In 1842 she had a second job as a governess. Charlotte did not enjoy being a governess, teaching, and got a post in Belgium, with her sister Emily.

Charlotte developed passionate feelings for her employer, Monsieur Heger, but he was married and they returned to England. With Anne, Charlotte and Emily compiled a book of poems under male pen names: *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* was published in 1846. The book was not published. In 1848, Branwell and Emily died from tuberculosis, and Anne the following year.

Charlotte, after ten years of acquaintance, married her father's curate, Reverend Arthur Nicholls, in 1846. He died the following year during her first pregnancy, aged 38. Charlotte had two other children in her lifetime: *Shirley* (1849) and *Villette* (1853). *The Professor* (1857) was published after her death.

Women: work and marriage

Marriage was a necessity to most women in Victorian England. A working-class woman could not live on her income alone. Women typically stayed at home and were supported by their husbands. A few middle-class women were supported by fathers, brothers or themselves through paid work, but opportunities were few.

To the middle-class woman, marriage offered a means of financial support and freedom from the precariousness of employment as a governess or teacher. The most common form of work for middle-class women at this time included housework, shop assistant, office work. These roles were scarce, and poorly paid.

Many unmarried women would end up in the workhouse: an institution for the poor and destitute in Victorian England, working in a factory for a subsistence. Begging and prostitution were also common for some women.

Acts of Law

1857 Divorce Act: this only granted divorce to a woman if her husband was physically or mentally incapacitated in addition to being adulterous. She lost all her claim to a share of the property or custody of the children before divorce was obtained.

1879 and 1882 Married Women's Property Acts enabled women to hold property (household goods) in their own will.

1873 and 1886 Infant Custody Acts gave mothers some rights to appeal for custody of their children.

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Women's legal rights

In Victorian society, wealthy men enjoyed the best legal rights. Women, especially those from lower social classes, were disadvantaged. Once married, women had few legal rights, including rights to own property, inherit, or sue. Rape in marriage was not recognised by law: sexual intercourse was considered a woman's duty, available only to the very few and the wealthy, and compromised a woman's acceptance in society.

In the 1850s, Barbara Leigh Smith and other feminist campaigners together petitioned for women's property in the same legal manner as men's, and to make provision favourable to women in the event of divorce. The Married Women's Property Act of 1857.

Fiction of the 1840s

Other writers producing fiction at the same time as Charlotte Brontë include Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, William Makepeace Thackeray, Charles Kingsley, Benjamin Disraeli, and George Eliot; their novels included *David Copperfield* (1849), *Dombey and Son* (1848), *Mary Barton* (1848), *Vanity Fair* (1848), *Alton Locke* (1850), and *Adam Bede* (1849).

The literary period known as the Victorian era is often characterised as the period of the 'social problem' novel, such as those by Dickens, Gaskell, and Disraeli, which dwelt upon the living conditions of the working poor in the developing industrial cities, especially Manchester.

While *Jane Eyre* does consider some contemporary issues – such as the condition of the working class – the novel is different, and unusual, in its concerns, with its focus on a middle-class woman's personal self-development.

Women writers

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the novel had a lower status than poetry or drama, and was not considered an important or valuable form to write in. Brontë and her sisters began work by writing poetry.

Poet Laureate is the title given to an important poet, appointed by the reigning monarch.

In 1837, at the age of 21, Charlotte wrote to the poet Robert Southey; she sent him some of her poetry, and asked for his advice. Writing poetry was not considered to be a suitable occupation for a woman at this period: when Southey wrote back to Charlotte, he argued that she should not continue to try and write poetry,

pronouncing: 'Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life; and it ought not to be.'

Charlotte felt very sure that her work would be dismissed as inferior if it was known to be hers, and this correspondence with a leading literary figure confirmed that for her. She decided to write fiction, and this correspondence with a leading literary figure confirmed that for her. When she submitted her first novel, *Jane Eyre*, she used a male pen name, Currer Bell. Her sisters, publishing under the name Acton Bell, also chose male literary pseudonyms.

Did you know?

George Eliot was the pen-name (pseudonym) of a woman called Mary Ann Evans. Charlotte Brontë chose to hide her sex as a writer.

During the period in which the Brontës were writing, the novel was not well-known for writing novels; the work of George Eliot was widely read and valued.

Contemporary reviews of *Jane Eyre*

On its publication in 1847, *Jane Eyre* sold well and was reviewed widely, with much praise from leading writers and critics in the press. There was debate over who the author was, and the moral issues of the story. *Jane Eyre* was criticised for its treatment of morality, especially the character of Rochester, who as an upper-class man and the romantic hero, is of dubious sexual morality. His marriage to the heroine at the end of the novel.

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Realism: A literary style that attempts to convey a sense of true life and realistic life events.

In the mid-nineteenth century, interest and realism were at its height. *Jane Eyre* is not an entirely realistic novel as it were seen negatively by some reviewers as being too sensational. Aspects of the novel were held to be sensational, such as the treatment of the setting of Thornfield Hall, the mad inmate, Bertha Mason: these were seen as belonging to less serious genres of fiction.

Other reviewers recognised and responded to the authenticity of the expression of feelings and emotion presented in the novel, and accepted the unique way in which it combined different generic and formal elements. The novelist, William Makepeace Thackeray, writing in *Fraser's Magazine* (December 1847) argued that: 'Reality – deep, significant reality – is the great characteristic of the book. It is an autobiography – not, perhaps, in the naked facts of the circumstances, but in the actual feelings and emotions which it conveys.'



Learning tasks

1. In the mid-nineteenth century some women writers chose to publish their works under pseudonyms. Discuss in pairs why it may be that some women did, and others did not.
2. In a group, identify three different marriages in the novel, and discuss how they are portrayed.
3. It is crucial to the plot and to the novel's messages that Jane inherits wealth from Mr. Rochester. List and discuss the reasons why in small groups.



Extended essay question

How does Charlotte Brontë portray contemporary attitudes towards women in *Jane Eyre*?



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Glossary of Key Terms

Allegory	A figure or story representing particular values or ideas, an example of which is the story of the blind men and an elephant.
Autobiography	A life-story written by the person who is living or has lived it.
Ballad	Form of song or poem from traditional folk culture, with a narrative and four-line stanza (quatrain) and with a refrain.
Characteronym	A name of a fictional character that indicates their personality.
Despotic	One who seeks power and control over others to oppress or oppressively control.
Dialect	Use of non-standard English from a particular place or community.
Dialogue	Rendition of spoken language between characters.
Eponymous	The name of a character named in the title of the novel.
Equality	The principle of all groups receiving equal and fair treatment.
Ethics	Value judgments about what behaviour toward others is right or wrong.
Feminist	Ideas, practices, actions based upon the belief of the equality of the sexes.
First-person narrator	One who tells a story with the personal pronoun, 'I', giving the reader a personal account of events.
Folk tale, folklore	The popular and enduring narratives, customs and stories of a community.
Formal	Relating to form: the narrative structure and other key narrative elements such as beginning, end, episodes, narrator.
Genre, generic	A group or family of texts – novels, plays, films – defined by a set of shared characteristics, such as science fiction, horror films.
Gothic	A genre characterised by common stylistic features including supernatural events and characters.
Imagery	Use of expressive language to create evocative images.
Melodrama	A style which typically expresses heightened emotion and high stakes events.
Metaphor	Stating one thing is another to convey strongly a particular aspect of meaning. Example: 'Her face was a white rose.'
Misogynist	Hateful of women. A misogynist is one who expresses or commits violence against women purely because they are female.
Morality, personal morality	One's judgement about what is right and wrong behaviour and the principles that guide that judgement.
Motif	A recurring image, word or idea which may establish mood, suggest a theme or support the theme.
Objective Correlative	This is a literary technique with which the writer may displace an emotion or feeling onto another aspect of their surroundings, such as into colour. The result may be to show rather than describe the character's emotion.
Personification	To describe an inanimate object with human qualities.
Perspective	A point of view or opinion of a character.

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Physiognomy	The head and facial features. In the nineteenth century it was known that you could know someone's character, and class, by studying these.
Poet Laureate	The title given to a culturally important poet, appointed by the monarch.
Prejudice	To prejudge and treat accordingly, often unfairly.
Protagonist	The central character who undertakes the actions in the narrative.
Pseudonym	A name that a writer chooses to publish their work under, e.g. Currer Bell was Charlotte Brontë's pseudonym.
Quest	A journey or challenge undertaken with a goal to find something.
Realism	Literary or artistic style expressed through a number of techniques to create a sense of true and realistic life events of a familiar world.
Romanticism	Nineteenth-century literary movement which valued strong emotions and explored in the supernatural.
Satire	A cultural form of criticism of political and social ideas, sometimes using humour.
Self-identity	Concepts or parts of a person relating to how they present themselves to others, i.e. relating to sex, gender, class, race, personality etc.
Simile	Compares one thing to another, using 'as' or 'like' in order to make a comparison. e.g. her hair shone like gold.
Social class	Group in society which may share levels of income, education, status etc.
Social justice	All groups in society are treated fairly and equally.
Subjective	Personal point of view, a biased opinion.
Symbol	An object to stand in for an abstract idea, belief, or action.
Symbolism	The use of symbols to communicate and develop ideas or emotions.
Tone	Expresses the narrator's attitude to the subject, the reader's attitude, or affection toward her characters through a gently humorous or serious tone.
Trope	A figure of speech, which is repeated in the literary text; for example, an image which is used repeatedly to produce a particular effect or convey a meaning. Metaphors and allegories are kinds of tropes.
Tuberculosis (TB) or consumption	A wasting disease which affects the lungs and usually leads to death.

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Further Reading

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Answers

Some suggested answers and content to some of the activities given in the Chapter 12 active learning task.

Chapter 3 activity: *What effect does this song have on the reader?*

It may alert the reader to a shift or change in the plot. It may encourage an emotion or create a feeling of empathy and/or anxiety about Jane and what is going to happen.

Chapter 4 practice exam question: *What is the significance of Aunt Reed as a character in the novel as a whole?*

Answers may explore some of the following: she is a fair, male stepmother character who punishes and treats Jane cruelly. Jane cannot escape her family of origin and the relationships. Her character can be related to themes and messages about power and relation to the character of Mr Brocklehurst and her collusion with his oppression and religion. We see Jane's development and strength in relation to her aunt, which is a victory over her aunt's injustice. However, in the novel as a whole, Jane's development in relation to her aunt when she forgives her later in the story, perhaps indicating her better relationships.

Chapter 6: *The novel explores how people deal with hardship and suffering. Evaluate how Helen respond to the hardships they face.*

A good answer will compare and contrast the two characters' approaches to their hardships. In an essay, summarising their values, outlooks and beliefs and demonstrating evidence of use of dialogue, with knowledge of the specific hardships in the Lowood episodes of the novel. Good answers will make a personal but informed judgment about Jane's death. Jane might even see Helen's death at a symbolic level, with her beliefs not fitting her own. Jane's by contrast, as one of a survivor. Treatment of Jane's responses to hardship should be more wide-ranging, demonstrating knowledge of the novel as a whole.

Chapter 7 exam practice question: *How does Brontë's characterisation of Brocklehurst reflect contemporary attitudes to the poor and vulnerable?*

Answers should explore the literary techniques used by Brontë – including satire, metaphor and simile, and speech – to create the character of Brocklehurst, demonstrating how this characterisation reflects contemporary attitudes. Analysis should link this characterisation to students' knowledge and understanding of the novel, in particular religious views.

Chapter 9 practice exam question: *Explore how Brontë makes Jane's experiences at Lowood demoralising.*

Answers should discuss the author's literary techniques – including realism – and how they create a sense of atmosphere and describe feelings. The setting of the school/orphanage and the way Jane is maltreated and humiliated can be explored in relation to social and historical contexts should be explored. The religious and educational institutions established (in relation to Brocklehurst) make Jane more vulnerable and weak. Her cruelty by staff (Miss Scatcherd) and the living conditions (TB, could all be explored productively. Reference to Jane's character and her sense of self should be considered.

Chapter 12 active learning task: *What are the parallels between these two characters and why Brontë might explore these, and analyse how she does this.*

Both are or will be wives of Rochester, and Brontë builds up parallels between the two characters who are restricted or constrained within Thornfield Hall. Jane feels limited in her life choices and is presented as irrational and having other animalistic qualities. Jane too is controlled by her feelings, but learns to control her behaviour and outbursts.

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Chapter 12 exam practice: Explore how Brontë builds the drama of this scene of the fire. Answers should focus on the range of literary stylistic techniques used by Brontë: reference to fairy tales and superstitions; action; symbolism of power relations.

Chapter 15: How does Brontë build a Gothic atmosphere here?

Discussion of her use of language and other stylistic techniques should focus on the emotions and feelings of fear, dread and anxiety. These communicate Jane's emotions and may attempt to reproduce them in the reader, giving them the pleasure of being in a state of suspense. Explore how a sense of mystery is being established through suggestions: Jane as a witness to facts.

Chapter 17 discussion: How do these characteristics of their relationship contribute to a sense of equality?

Jane reflects that although she and Rochester are from different social classes and have different backgrounds, she feels that they have aspects of their character and personality in common.

Chapter 21 exam practice: Consider how Mrs Reed is presented in this extract (Ch. 21). Answers should consider her characterisation as a cold and hard person, who does not show any remorse for her cruelties; her motivations in confession; as belonging to an unhappy family and her relationships.

Chapter 22 discussion point: Jane says, 'a wanderer's repose or a sinner's reform or a fellow-creature'. What does she mean?

Discussion should encompass both Jane and Rochester's characters in terms of their shared experiences. Jane urges that Rochester take responsibility for his actions and past sins. Her emphasis is on his autonomy and self-reliance for betterment.

Chapter 23 exam practice: Consider the ways in which Jane and Rochester's relationship is symbolised in this extract (end of Ch. 23).

Answers should consider the symbolism of the setting, the season, the weather and the presence of the tree.

Chapter 24 active learning task: Find out who Danae was. Why is Jane referring to Danae? In Greek myth, Danae was a goddess who Zeus came to seduce, in the form of a shower of gold. It refers to being showered with gold, but more specifically in the myth, Zeus acted in this way.

Chapter 25 active learning task: Consider how Brontë builds anticipation of the wedding scene. What atmosphere does she create, and how?

Answers should focus upon the events leading up to the wedding scene; the Gothic elements and supernatural and creating mystery and fear.

Chapter 26 discussion points: 'Conscience + Reason + Passion by the throat'. Explore the language in this extract and explain how it relates to the situation Jane is in. How do you as a reader feel about Jane's decision? Why does she make this decision? Why/what is the outcome?

Exploration of the dilemma between Jane's strong feelings is one in which students should consider their personal perspective, while acknowledging the historical context and Jane's beliefs about her morality regarding marriage and ideas about equality. This can be extended to a point about her decision.

Chapter 26 exam practice: Explore how Bertha is presented and how others react to her (Ch. 26) and elsewhere in the novel.

This is an opportunity to consider characterisation and Brontë's use of the Gothic to represent Bertha. More able students should give some consideration to the ethical implications of her representation – around madness and her racial identity – and the context in which she is presented.

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Chapter 30 active learning task: *Make some notes about Jane's thoughts on St John and the descriptions of his character. How does Brontë symbolise his qualities?*

Answers could refer to the language of natural elements and their contrasts – his nature – rock, ice, blue gems – that symbolise his hard and cold nature. These contrast with his passionate warm nature.

Chapter 31–32 exam practice: *The novel explores the theme of self-identity. Evaluate how two characters develop their self-identity.*

This is an opportunity for students to plot character's life journeys in the novel – for St John – and to link them to key quotations.

Chapter 33–35 exam practice: *Consider how St John is presented in this extract, and evaluate how Brontë develops his character and relationship with Jane. What should be made.*

Chapter 33–35 exam practice: *How does Brontë present Jane as a strong female character (Ch. 35) and how does she develop her role?*

Focus upon how Jane's determination and independence can be made and linked to events in the novel, taking in to consideration the social context of her position of inequality as a poor governess.

Chapter 36–38 active learning task: *Explore the language of this quotation, and evaluate what St John is describing. Then, with a partner, evaluate what he says.*

Students should attempt to consider the religious framework and moral beliefs of St John, and evaluate his meaning. Discussion might include evaluation of how this is meaningful to students.

Chapter 36–38 exam practice: *The novel explores the subject of marriage. Evaluate how characters think about marriage.*

Students should be encouraged to consider this theme in relation to others such as religion, and to acknowledge the social context of women's position in the society. Comparison of different perspectives could be productive to structure an answer.

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