



Jane Eyre

Charlotte Brontë





R A I N B O W S

Charlotte Brontë

Jane Eyre

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edisco

Jane Eyre

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The Author

Charlotte Brontë



Charlotte Brontë was born in 1816 in Thornton, Yorkshire. She belonged to a large family of eight people. Her father was a strict Anglican clergyman of Irish origin and her mother died very early, leaving six children, five girls – Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Emily and Anne – and one boy, Branwell.

The children were educated at home, at Haworth Parsonage, a big, dark house in the Yorkshire moors.

They liked playing outside, but they also enjoyed reading from their father's library and started inventing stories.

The four eldest sisters were sent to the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge: it was a cheap school where food was bad and discipline strict. It would eventually become the model for Lowood School in *Jane Eyre*. Maria, 11, and Elizabeth, 10, soon died of tuberculosis there, so Charlotte and Emily were brought back home. Charlotte would recall her two dead sisters in the character of Helen Burns whose destiny was the same.

At 15, Charlotte attended Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head: this experience was positive for her because she made some friendships that would last for all her life.

As Charlotte wanted to help her family and in particular her brother Branwell to develop his artistic talent, she started to work as a teacher, but soon realised that that job did not suit her.

In 1842, Charlotte and Emily went to Brussels to improve their French and studied at M. Héger's school. He was a clever teacher and had an interesting and eccentric personality. Probably, Charlotte fell in love with him, but he was married and they simply exchanged love letters, which, however, she stopped writing to avoid any misunderstandings¹.

1. *misunderstanding*: a situation in which something is not understood correctly.

In the meantime, Charlotte, Emily and Anne had started writing poems and in 1846 they published, at their expenses, an unsuccessful collection, signing it with male pen names² with their same initials: Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. They also wrote some novels which would become milestones³ in English literature.

Fame and success came to Charlotte with her second novel, *Jane Eyre*, in 1847, after she failed to place *The Professor*. In the same year, Emily published *Wuthering Heights* and Anne *Agnes Grey*. The three sisters still used the false names they had invented pretending⁴ to be men.

The following period was really sad for the Brontë family. In 1848, Branwell died because of opium and alcohol and, a few months later, Emily also died of tuberculosis. Anne died the following year, too.

Charlotte became lonely and depressed, but she continued writing and published two other novels: *Shirley* and *Villette*. She also went to London to see her publishers and meet famous writers such as W. M. Thackeray and her future biographer, Elizabeth Gaskell.

After refusing three marriage proposals, she accepted, against her father's will, Arthur Bell Nicholls's. He was a clergyman, the curate⁵ at Charlotte's father's church. They got married in 1854 and their life together was quiet: he didn't share his wife's intellectual life, but he was happy for her success. Unfortunately, Charlotte died the following year, while she was pregnant with her first child.

2. *pen name*: name used by a writer instead of his/her real name.
3. *milestone*: very important event.
4. *pretending*: saying that something is true when it is not.
5. *curate*: priest of a lower grade (who helps the priest in charge of an area).



Haworth parsonage



BEFORE READING

1 Jane Eyre is the main character of this novel and she lives in the 1850s. What do you think her story is about?

- a. The adventures of a young girl travelling around Europe.
- b. A hidden secret of Jane Eyre's family and its discovery.
- c. A passionate love story between Jane and a rich man.
- d. Jane's life and its dramatic events from childhood to maturity.
- e. A mysterious crime solved by Jane Eyre as a detective.

2 You are going to find these words in the first chapter. Match them with their meanings.

- | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|---|
| a. Fault | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. A place under a window where you can sit. |
| b. Consumption | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. A small board used for writing. |
| c. Window-seat | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. A bed with bars for a child. |
| d. Clergyman | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. When you are responsible for something bad. |
| e. Slate | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. A serious lung disease. |
| f. Liar | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. A male priest. |
| g. Subscriber | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. Someone who doesn't say the truth. |
| h. Crib | <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. Someone who pays money to help an institution. |

3 Use some of these verbs you will find in the text to complete the sentences.

drew • whispered • locked • suggested • fainted

- a. The pupils to each other because the breakfast was horrible.
- b. The door was and nobody could go in.
- c. The girl felt sick and fell down because she
- d. The doctor wanted to give some advice, so he a new treatment.
- e. Jane the curtain closed to stay quiet.

Jane Eyre

My early years: from Gateshead to Lowood

Chapter 1

The red room where I was locked in was one of the largest of the house: a big bed, enveloped¹ by red curtains, stood in the centre, red was the carpet and dark brown all the furniture. Nobody had slept there since Mr Reed, my uncle, had died in that bed. All looked colder and darker there, and I started feeling scared.

Unjust! That was unjust! Why had my aunt punished and locked me alone in this horrible place? It hadn't been my fault, but my cousin John's, as always! He kept tormenting me because he was fourteen years old and I only ten...

My parents had died when I was a little girl and my uncle had taken me to live with his family, but now he was dead too and his wife, Mrs Reed, and her children, John, Georgiana and Eliza, mistreated² me all the time.

That day they were all together in the sitting room, when I was sent away.

"Bessie says you are very rude, so I don't want you to stay near us until you learn to behave better!" Mrs Reed had said.

Bessie was one of the servants.

"What does Bessie say I've done?" I had asked.

"Shut up! Children mustn't answer back to adults!" my aunt had replied, angrily.

Since they didn't want me there, I had gone to the next room and taken a book from the bookcase. I had sat on the window-seat and drawn the curtain: I was happy to be there reading and I felt safe in my hiding place. Unfortunately, after a while, John had come to look for me.

"Madam Mope³... where are you?" he had called out.

I had soon come out because I was afraid he would hit me.

1. *enveloped*: covered.

2. *mistreated*: badly treated.

3. *mope*: unhappiness.

“What are you doing with this book?” he had asked. “It’s mine, like all the other things in this house! You are an orphan, you have no money and you should beg⁴, instead of living with gentlemen’s children like us! I’ll teach you to steal my books!”

He had taken the book and thrown it at me: I had fallen down and cut my head against the door. The pain was sharp⁵, so, when he had run towards me and grasped my hair, I had reacted and hit him. He had called aloud for his sisters and mother and, when they had arrived, they had separated us and Mrs Reed had ordered me to be taken away to the red room.

And there I was. The sun was going down and the room was in complete darkness. Suddenly, I saw a strange light gleaming⁶ on the wall and then over my head. I was full of horror: someone or something from another world was coming to me!!! I rushed to the door and cried to be let out. Bessie and Mrs Reed arrived,

“What is all this noise?” my aunt asked.

“Please, have pity! Forgive me! Let me be punished some other way! I saw a light, I thought a ghost would come!”

“Silence! Your violence is repulsive⁷!” she replied, and locked me in without any other word. The fear was too much and I fainted⁸.

When I woke up, I was in my bed. Bessie and Mr Lloyd, the doctor, were next to me. He told me I was going to feel better soon. The next day I got up, but I still felt weak. The frightening experience of the previous night had shocked me deeply and a great sadness was filling my heart and my eyes with tears.

When Mr Lloyd came again, he asked me,

“Why are you crying? Aren’t you happy here?”

I told him what had happened and how lonely I felt and rejected by my aunt and my cousins.

“Would you like to go to school then?” he asked, and I answered that I would.

“Well, well, who knows what may happen?” said the doctor.

4. *beg*: to ask for food or money because you are poor.
5. *sharp*: severe and sudden.

6. *gleaming*: shining.
7. *repulsive*: revolting, disgusting.
8. *fainted*: became unconscious.



Jasmine De Goede as young Jane Eyre – Octagon Theatre Bolton, 2018
(Photo by Richard Davenport)

After some months, finally, one day in January, I was called by my aunt to meet Mr Brocklehurst, a clergyman, who, I discovered, was the director of a school for girls at Lowood. What an ugly man he was! Dressed in black, with a big nose, a large mouth and prominent⁹ teeth. I felt shy and unconfident¹⁰ answering his questions.

“Do you read your Bible with pleasure?” he asked me.

“Sometimes,” I answered.

“And the Psalms? I hope you like them.”

“No, sir. Psalms are not interesting,” I remarked.

“That proves you have a wicked¹¹ heart and you must pray God for a new and clean one!” he added.

I was going to ask him how this could happen, when Aunt Reed told him I was a liar and suggested that the teachers keep a strict eye on me. There was no way out... I was completely ruined¹²! What could I do to remedy this vile¹³ blow¹⁴? Nothing! I suddenly saw myself transformed into a lying, hypocrite child in the priest’s eyes.

After describing the strict discipline and humble life style at Lowood, Mr Brocklehurst left the house: he would go to the school in a week or two, but he would give instructions to wait for my arrival in the meantime. I was so angry with Mrs Reed that, for the first time in my life, I dared¹⁵ to tell her all about my sadness and pain and all my hate for her. It was so liberating!

A few days later, I was ready to leave. Goodbye, Gateshead! I wouldn’t miss it, to be sure! The journey was very long and tiring, but at last the coach stopped.

“Is there a girl called Jane Eyre?” someone asked when the coach door opened. I answered “Yes”, and my new life began.

It was dark, rainy and windy when I arrived at Lowood school. A tall lady led me through rooms and corridors to a wide, long room with long tables and benches. There, I saw my schoolmates for the first time: girls of every age wearing an ugly, brown uniform, humming¹⁶

9. *prominent*: sticking out.

10. *unconfident*: embarrassed, nervous.

11. *wicked*: bad.

12. *ruined*: lost, with no hope.

13. *vile*: unpleasant, hard.

14. *blow*: stroke.

15. *dared*: had the courage to.



"There I saw my schoolmates for the first time..."

as I walked along. The oldest girls collected the supper trays and all the girls, two by two, marched to the bedroom. There was a long row¹⁷ of beds and I was given one, where I immediately fell asleep.

The next morning, the sound of a bell woke me up. Like the others, I dressed and tried to wash my face, but I couldn't, as there was only one basin¹⁸ of iced water for six girls. The start of the day was devoted to the reading of the Bible. After one hour we had breakfast: the smell was terrible! The porridge was burnt – as usual I found out – so, nobody had breakfast.

After lunch we could spend some time in the garden, which was big and surrounded by a high wall. The other girls were running and playing together and didn't care about me. Looking around I saw a tablet¹⁹ with these words cut in stone,

LOWOOD ORPHANAGE
THIS PORTION WAS REBUILT A.D. –, BY NAOMI
BROCKLEHURST OF BROCKLEHURST HALL, IN THIS COUNTRY.

so I asked a girl who was reading a book,
“What does it mean? What is Lowood Orphanage?”
“It is the house you have just come to live in,” she answered.
“Is it a school?” I went on asking.

16. *humming*: making a long, continuous sound.
17. *row*: line.

18. *basin*:



19. *tablet*: flat piece of stone.

“Yes, it is a charity²⁰ school: you and me are charity children. Lowood is an institution for educating orphans, like you and me.”

I wanted to know more.

“Do we pay any money for school and accommodation?”

“Our friends pay for us £15 a year, but it is not enough, so subscribers pay the difference.”

“And who subscribes?”

“Charitable ladies and gentlemen like Naomi Brocklehurst, whose name you saw on the tablet. She rebuilt the house and now her son, a clergyman who lives not far from here, is the treasurer²¹ and manager of the establishment.”

I changed the subject of our conversation and asked,

“Do you like the teachers here? In my opinion Miss Temple is the best!”

“She is very good and clever indeed,” she answered.

“Are you happy here?” I continued asking.

She had had enough of our conversation and replied,

“You are asking too many questions! Now I want to read!”

Later in the afternoon I saw the girl I had talked to again. She was now standing in the middle of the room, punished for something she had done wrong. ‘What a shame!’ I thought. ‘What humiliation!’ She, however, bore²² it very well, and stood there quite aloof²³, as if day-dreaming²⁴.

The following day I started attending lessons in the fourth class, but I found them boring and difficult. Again, my attention was caught by the same girl, the one I had spoken to who had been punished the day before.

“Burns!” – that was her surname – Miss Scatcherd, one of the teachers, angrily addressed her. “You are a dirty, disagreeable girl! You haven’t cleaned your nails this morning!”

Burns gave no answer. She did not react even when the teacher took a rod²⁵ and gave her a dozen strokes on her neck. I couldn’t understand how she could keep so calm.

20. *charity*: helping people in need.

21. *treasurer*: person responsible for the money of an association or company.

22. *bore* (*bear-bore-borne*): stood, endured.

23. *aloof*: detached.

24. *day-dreaming*: having a pleasant thought to forget reality.

25. *rod*:



WORKING ON THE TEXT

1 Put the sentences in the right order to make up a summary of the chapter.

- a. After some months, Mrs Reed decided to send Jane away to Lowood institution.
- b. One day, Mr Brocklehurst warned the pupils and the teachers against Jane and said she was a liar.
- c. Jane Eyre was an eight-year-old child and an orphan.
- d. However, Jane became friend with a school mate, Helen Burns.
- e. After an accident with her cousin John, Jane was punished and locked in the frightening red room.
- f. Also, Helen's health got worse and she died of consumption.
- g. Her uncle, Mr Reed, took her to live with his family at Gateshead.
- h. Miss Temple, the kind director of the school, helped Jane prove her innocence.
- i. When he died, Mrs Reed and her children tormented Jane.
- j. Spring arrived, but the cold winter and the bad food caused an epidemic of typhus, so many girls died.
- k. Life at Lowood was very hard because of the strict discipline, the poor diet and the cold.

2 Answer the following questions on the text.

1. Why was Jane sent to the red room? Why did she faint there?

.....

2. What did Mr Brocklehurst ask Jane when he met her for the first time?

.....

3. Who paid for the charity school "Lowood Orphanage"?

.....

4. Why was Miss Scatcherd always blaming Helen Burns?

.....

5. How was Jane punished after she broke her slate?

.....

WORKING ON VOCABULARY

3 Match these adjectives with their synonyms, then use the ones in the first column to complete the sentences.

- | | | |
|------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| a. Strict | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. Fragile, feeble |
| b. Angry | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. Pleased, satisfied |
| c. Weak | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. Annoyed, irritated |
| d. Proud | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. Embarrassed, guilty |
| e. Shy | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. Severe, hard |
| f. Ashamed | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. Introverted, timid |

- a. At Lowood, teachers were really with their pupils to give them a good education.
- b. John got with Jane because she had taken a book from the bookcase.
- c. After a long, cold winter, many of the girls at Lowood were and sick.
- d. Jane deeply admired Miss Temple and she hoped that she would be of her.
- e. Jane felt when she had to stand on a stool for breaking a slate.
- f. Helen seemed a quiet, girl, but she had great moral strength.

WORKING ON GRAMMAR

4 Complete the sentences with the verbs in brackets, either in the *past simple* or in the *past continuous tense*.

- a. John (*find*) Jane while she (*read*) a book in the window seat.
- b. When she was in the red room, Jane (*think*) a ghost (*come*) to take her away.
- c. While the girls (*play*) in the garden, Jane (*meet*) Helen for the first time.
- d. When Mr Brocklehurst (*come*) to inspect the school, Jane (*do*) some maths exercises.
- e. Helen (*lie*) in bed, while Jane (*spend*) her days in the open air.

WORKING ON SKILLS

Listening



Listen to a conversation between the doctor, Mr Lloyd, and Jane, then say if the statements are true or false. Correct the false ones.

- | | T | F |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Jane cried because she was ill. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Mr Lloyd tells Jane she must be afraid of ghosts. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Jane wished she had a candle in the red room. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Jane is sad because she doesn't have a family. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. Jane has some rich relations somewhere. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. Jane would prefer to beg rather than to live with Mrs Reeds. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Writing

- 6 Imagine you are Helen Burns. Write one or two paragraphs in your diary, talking about your new best friend, Jane.

Dear journal,

Yesterday, during the break, I went into the school garden. I was reading a book when a girl came near me and...

Speaking

- 7 Imagine you are Jane. Explain to Helen why you admire Miss Temple so much. Use some of these ideas:

nice and kind to children • gentle when speaking • ready to give advice and support • good memories with her: tea together • goodnight kiss...



Jane as a child

EDUCATION IN THE VICTORIAN AGE



Queen Victoria and her family

Charlotte Brontë lived most of her adult life during the Victorian Age, which took its name from Queen Victoria. Her reign (1837-1901) was one of the longest in the history of England, characterised by material progress, imperial expansion and social reforms. However, living and working conditions were greatly different according to social status, and poverty and injustice still marked this period.

As for education, only upper and middle classes were able to send their male children to private and famous schools. Girls were usually educated at home to learn how to become good wives and mothers, as well as social activities such as speaking French, playing an instrument, singing and drawing.

Until they were old enough to be sent to a boarding school or have a tutor, all children were taught at home by a governess. Most governesses were members of the middle class, with polite manners and good education, but they were often treated like servants; their pay was poor and they lived in sad isolation both from the other servants and their masters.

In the early Victorian Age, poor children had to work to support their families, spending up to 16 hours a day in factories and living in crowded and unhealthy houses. A few of them received an education, mainly thanks to charitable institutions, like “dame” or “Sunday” schools. The first ones were run by women at their homes where they taught reading, writing and simple arithmetic, while the second ones were organised by the church and taught reading the Bible.



A governess during Victorian Age

The so-called “ragged¹” schools became popular as well: they were meant for orphans or very poor children and often provided free meals and clothes, too. “The Ragged School Union” was created in 1844 and by 1861 as many as 176 schools were associated with the purpose to found a national system of popular education.

At first the government tried to improve schooling for all children by financing these institutions in the form of grants², though some fees³ were required. In 1870 the Elementary Education Act made teaching children between 5 and 10 years old compulsory⁴. However, a lot of poor children didn’t attend school as their families couldn’t afford either to pay its cost of one penny a day or to lose the money the children could earn with their work. It was only in 1891 that schooling became free.

What was the teaching method like? Pupils, up to 78 or 80 per class, were taught the three “Rs”, that is Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic. They had to learn everything by heart⁵ and copy lists of words. Practical subjects could also be taught, like needlework⁶, cookery and woodwork.

Finally, discipline was very strict and unimaginable nowadays. Teachers were severe and scary. A cane⁷ on the bottom for males and on the hands for girls was commonly used as a punishment for being rude, answering back, missing Sunday prayers, being late or untidy or doing poor work. Slow pupils were not understood or helped for their problems, but only considered lazy: as a punishment they had to wear a “dunce’s hat⁸” in a corner of the class. Another punishment was to stand on a stool for one or more hours in the middle of a room, watched by all the other pupils as a warning.



Lace school for girls

1. *ragged*: untidy, with old and torn clothes.
2. *grant*: sum of money given by the government.
3. *fee*: amount of money that you pay to join an organisation.
4. *compulsory*: something that must be done for a law or a rule.
5. *by heart*: using only your memory.
6. *needlework*: making things by sewing, using a thin piece of steel and thread.
7. *cane*: a long, thin stick to hit people.
8. *dunce’s hat*: →





Jane Eyre

A hard life is apparently Jane's destiny: left an orphan, raised by a stern, unkind aunt with three mean cousins and sent to a school with harsh rules and little to eat... However, her desire to find her own place in the world will lead her to independence, love and family, but not without difficulties to overcome. A new job, jealousy, threats, love, proposals, disappointment, friendship and forgiveness will make Jane's dream come true.

This Victorian novel is a milestone in English literature and well explores the thoughts and actions of a young girl of the time – but at the same time remarkably contemporary – who struggles between love and passion, independence and conscience in an attempt to find her place in society.

beginner

• **A1** (Breakthrough)

elementary

• **A2** (Waystage)



pre-intermediate

• **B1** (Threshold)

intermediate

• **B2** (Vantage)

post-intermediate

• **C1** (Effectiveness)

Levels of accredited examination boards:

Cambridge English: Preliminary (PET)
Trinity: Grade 5, 6 / ISE I
City & Guilds (Pitman): Intermediate
ESB: Intermediate 1, 2
Edexcel: Elementary



Teacher's Resources available on line:
Answer Key, Audioscripts, Summing-up Activities.