

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Charlotte Brontë** was born in 1816. Her father was a clergyman<sup>1</sup> and the family lived in a parsonage<sup>2</sup> in Haworth, a small village in Yorkshire. Her mother died when she was five and Charlotte and her brother and sisters were brought up<sup>3</sup> by their aunt. For a short time she attended a school with her older sisters Maria and Elizabeth and her younger sister, Emily. However, when Maria and Elizabeth both died of tuberculosis<sup>4</sup> in 1825, Charlotte and Emily left the school and their father taught them, and their brother Branwell, at home.

Charlotte worked for a short time as a governess<sup>5</sup> in England, and then went to Brussels to learn French and later to teach there.



On Charlotte's return to Yorkshire, she tried to open a school in Haworth together with her sisters Emily and Anne. But it was not a success because Haworth was too isolated. Instead she and her sisters turned to<sup>6</sup> writing.

In 1846 Charlotte persuaded her sisters to publish *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* (the sisters all had pseudonyms<sup>7</sup> because it was not common for women of the time to be writers). This was a commercial disaster. But in 1847 Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* was published and the book was an immediate success.

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

- <sup>1</sup> **clergyman:** priest
- <sup>2</sup> **parsonage:** house that the Church of England gives a priest to live in
- <sup>3</sup> **brought up:** looked after (a child)
- <sup>4</sup> **tuberculosis:** a serious infectious disease
- <sup>5</sup> **governess:** woman who lives with a family and teaches their children at home
- <sup>6</sup> **turned to:** started
- <sup>7</sup> **pseudonyms:** names used by writers instead of their own names

## ABOUT THE BOOK

*Jane Eyre* (1847) is set<sup>1</sup> in the Yorkshire Dales<sup>2</sup> in Victorian Britain<sup>3</sup>. It was not a conventional<sup>4</sup> novel of the time, but was an immediate success with the reading public and is still popular today.

*Jane Eyre* is a story about growth<sup>5</sup>, courage and love. The novel tells the story of a poor orphan<sup>6</sup> girl who grows up in a difficult environment. Jane Eyre's character evolves gradually. The reader can see Jane Eyre's passions as a young girl slowly turn to reason as she becomes a more mature and independent woman. For this reason the novel can be seen as a *Bildungsroman*<sup>7</sup>.

- <sup>1</sup> **is set:** takes place in
- <sup>2</sup> **dales:** hills and valleys
- <sup>3</sup> **Victorian Britain:** see page 13
- <sup>4</sup> **conventional:** traditional or ordinary
- <sup>5</sup> **growth:** (here) development, both physical and emotional
- <sup>6</sup> **orphan:** child with no parents
- <sup>7</sup> **Bildungsroman:** novel which follows the growth and emotional development of the central character
- <sup>8</sup> **boarding school:** type of school where you live

The book is written as a first-person narrative by the protagonist Jane Eyre. In this way the reader has direct contact with Jane and her feelings and actions. Jane Eyre is a courageous woman who works hard to change and improve her situation.

After leaving her unloving aunt at Gateshead Hall, Jane Eyre goes to boarding school<sup>8</sup> at Lowood Institution. She learns to become a governess and gets her first job at Thornfield Hall. Jane soon falls in love with her employer, Mr Rochester. Their love is complicated because of her position as his governess but also for another important reason: the mysterious presence in the attic of Thornfield Hall.


Jane Eyre does not stop loving Mr Rochester but she also wants to be a respected and independent woman. Her choices throughout the novel show her to be a strong and modern heroine of her time and one of the first feminist role models in literature. The novel deals with many themes including women's role in society, family, social class and forgiveness.

## BEFORE READING

**1** Look at these pictures of Jane Eyre. Match the correct description to each picture.

- (a) Jane with her cousin in her aunt's home.
- (b) Jane with her friend at boarding school.
- (c) Jane with her pupil when she is a governess.
- (d) Jane with her beloved as an independent woman.



 **2** What kind of person do you think Jane Eyre is? Work with a partner and write a list of possible words to describe her.

- 3** Jane Eyre is an orphan. Here is a definition of the word “orphan”.

**orphan** ['ɔrfən]

(noun) a child whose parents are dead.

Look at these groups of different people in the story.  
Use a dictionary to help you with any words you do not understand. Match the correct title to the group of people.

① School

② House

③ Family

- |       |               |                |         |         |       |
|-------|---------------|----------------|---------|---------|-------|
| _____ | (a) aunt      | uncle          | cousin  |         |       |
| _____ | (b) teacher   | superintendent | owner   | monitor | pupil |
| _____ | (c) governess | housekeeper    | servant | ward    | maid  |

- 4** Match the titles from Exercise **3** to the sentences below.

- \_\_\_\_\_ (a) Jane Eyre works as a governess at Thornfield Hall. Her little ward is called Adela. The housekeeper, Mrs Fairfax, is friendly and kind. Jane meets and gradually falls in love with the owner of the house, Mr Rochester.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (b) The only nice teacher at Lowood is the superintendent Miss Temple. The owner, Mr Brocklehurst, is very strict.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (c) When Jane Eyre's parents die she is sent to live with her aunt and uncle and her cousins: the Reed family.

5 Match the words from the story with the pictures.

slates  
advertisement  
stool  
easel  
piano  
drawing  
sewing  
benches



a \_\_\_\_\_



b \_\_\_\_\_



c \_\_\_\_\_



d \_\_\_\_\_



e \_\_\_\_\_



f \_\_\_\_\_



g \_\_\_\_\_



h \_\_\_\_\_

**6** Use each of the words from Exercise **5** to complete the following sentences.

- a** In the library there was an \_\_\_\_\_ for painting.
- b** I wanted to look for a new job so I decided to put an \_\_\_\_\_ in the newspaper.
- c** I was standing on a \_\_\_\_\_ in the middle of the room and everyone was looking at me.
- d** When Mr Brocklehurst entered the schoolroom everyone stopped writing on their \_\_\_\_\_ and stood up.
- e** I decided to spend the afternoon doing some \_\_\_\_\_ for Adela's lessons the next day so I went upstairs to get some paper and pencils.
- f** Grace Poole does the \_\_\_\_\_ and other jobs.
- g** Girls of all ages were sitting on wooden \_\_\_\_\_ on each side of long tables.
- h** I heard her invite him to sing while she played the \_\_\_\_\_.



- 7 Look at this picture of different kinds of rural Victorian transport. Match these words to the numbers in the picture.

on foot  
open carriage  
coach  
on horse




**8** Read the following text about Victorian Britain.

The Victorian age in British history is named after Queen Victoria, who was Britain's queen from 1837 until 1901. Life in Victorian times was not the same as it is now. There were big differences in homes, schools, jobs and entertainments. No TV, no computers, no central heating.

Transport was very different too.

Most people travelled on foot or by coach for longer distances. Only richer people had horses to ride or carriages to go out in. Train travel in the 1840s was still very rare because there weren't many railway lines. There were no cars (until the last few years of Victoria's reign). There was no air travel but only very long journeys on ships.



-  Work with a partner and write a list of the differences between life now and in Victorian times. Discuss with another pair.



## 1. Gateshead Hall



It was raining heavily and very cold outside. My aunt, Mrs Reed, was lying on a sofa in front of the fire in the drawing room<sup>1</sup>. Her three children Eliza, John, and Georgiana were sitting around her but she didn't want me there.

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

I went into the breakfast room and chose a book from the bookcase<sup>2</sup>. Then I climbed into the window seat<sup>3</sup> behind the curtain with it.

Suddenly the door opened.

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

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

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

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

"What do you want?" I asked.



<sup>1</sup> **drawing room:** comfortable room in a large house used for relaxing

<sup>2</sup> **bookcase:**

<sup>3</sup> **window seat:** seat below a window



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

John Reed was fourteen—four years older than me and he bullied<sup>1</sup> me continually. I was very afraid of him. No one in the house took my side<sup>2</sup>. The servants were too afraid and his mother, Mrs Reed, didn't notice. I was completely alone.

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

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

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

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

I was sure he wanted to hit me again.

"What were you doing behind the curtain?" he demanded.

"I was reading."



<sup>1</sup> **bullied:** hurt and frightened because I was smaller and less powerful

<sup>2</sup> **took my side:** supported me



"Show me the book."

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

"You have no right<sup>3</sup> to take our books. You aren't part of our family. You have no money. Your father left you nothing. You have no right to live here with gentlemen's children like us and eat the same meals that we eat and wear clothes that our mama buys for you. I'll teach you to take my books! Because they are mine. Everything in this house will be mine in a few years. Go and stand by the door."

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

"Wicked<sup>4</sup> and cruel<sup>5</sup> boy!" I said. "You are like a murderer! You are like the Roman emperors!"

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

He ran towards me, grabbed<sup>6</sup> my hair and shook me. I fought back furiously.

"Rat! Rat!" he shouted.

Eliza and Georgiana ran to find Mrs Reed. They came back with Bessie the nurse<sup>7</sup> and Miss Abbot the maid<sup>8</sup> behind them.

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

<sup>3</sup> **have no right:** are not authorized to

<sup>4</sup> **wicked:** bad

<sup>5</sup> **cruel:** very unkind and wanting to cause pain

<sup>6</sup> **grabbed:** took suddenly and with force

<sup>7</sup> **nurse:** (here) woman who takes care of someone's young children

<sup>8</sup> **maid:** (here) woman who works as a servant in someone's house



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

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

"Hold her arms, Miss Abbot," shouted Bessie. "She's like a mad cat."

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

"Sit still or I'll tie your hands," said Bessie.

"I won't move," I promised and held the chair with my hands.

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

"Don't forget, Miss," Bessie began, 'that you owe a lot to'<sup>1</sup> Mrs Reed. The only reason that you aren't in the poorhouse<sup>2</sup> is because she looks after you."

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

## JANE

- What do we know about Jane? Tick (✓) the correct boxes.
  - ☐ She is an orphan.
  - ☐ She has no money.
  - ☐ She is not happy.
  - ☐ She is not welcome in the home where she lives.
  - ☐ She has a good relationship with her cousins.
  - ☐ She is a servant in the house.

<sup>1</sup> owe a lot to: need to thank

<sup>2</sup> poorhouse: building where very poor people could live and eat