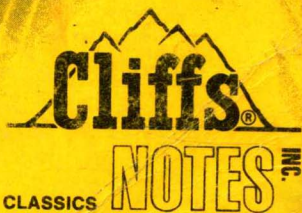


CLIFFS NOTES on

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BRONTE'S JANE EYRE



YOUR KEY TO THE CLASSICS

JANE EYRE

NOTES

including

- *Life and Background*
- *List of Characters*
- *Summaries and Commentaries*
- *Character Analyses*
- *Questions for Review*

by

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Jane Eyre Notes

Life and Background

Charlotte Brontë, the third child of Patrick Brontë, clergyman, was born April 21, 1816. When she was almost four, the family moved to Haworth, where the parsonage stood below the level of the churchyard that encompassed it on two sides. Beyond that stretched the wild moors.

When Charlotte was five, her mother died and left six children to the care of their mother's sister, a woman who was afraid of catching cold and who therefore kept to her own room much of the time. Mr. Brontë took his meals in his own room, and the children, generally left to their own devices, formed among themselves a close companionship.

The two older girls, Maria and Elizabeth, died in 1825 as a result of ill treatment at the Cowan Bridge School and subsequent tuberculosis. Helen Burns in *Jane Eyre* is a faithful portrait of Maria Brontë.

The four surviving children, Charlotte, Bramwell, Emily, and Anne learned to live in an imaginary world. They wrote stories of their world in tiny script in miniature books that today have to be read with a magnifying glass. The adjustment from the imaginary to the real world was difficult. Bramwell failed as an artist; Emily succeeded with *Wuthering Heights*, the novel which was written entirely without worldly experience.

When the girls saw that to earn their living as governesses would be too painful, they planned to operate a school themselves. Charlotte and Emily went to Brussels to obtain further education. Charlotte fell in love with the husband of the woman who operated the school, a painful and anguished experience, part of which comes out in Jane's suffering over Mr. Rochester.

When the aunt died, Emily stayed home with her father, and Charlotte went back to Brussels. When she came home the girls planned to open the school, but when Bramwell came home in disgrace, they put off plans.

The three sisters decided to write, and first published a volume of poems signed by Currier, Ellis, and Acton Bell. Then they turned to fiction. In 1847 Emily's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne's *Agnes Grey* were accepted. Charlotte's *The Professor* was not. Charlotte, however, began *Jane Eyre*, which was a great success.

In rebellion against heroes who were always handsome and heroines who were always beautiful, Charlotte determined to make her characters interesting without the tag of physical beauty. She also created a woman who could get along in the world without any help from anyone, a possibility which was startling in the early nineteenth century.

At first the public could not believe that the books of the three sisters had been written by young women, a clergyman's daughters at that. Some objected that the book *Jane Eyre* was too passionate.

Some critics today say that *Jane Eyre* is the story of woman's place in the early nineteenth century. Rather, it is a story that a plain, lonely, motherless girl wrote out of the anguish of her own life.

Soon after the publication and wide acceptance of *Jane Eyre*, in 1848, Bramwell died. Within a few weeks Emily too died, and Anne sickened with fatal illness. Charlotte, left alone, tried to write, but found it difficult.

In 1854 she married her father's curate, the Rev. Arthur Bell Nicholls, but died within the year with complications of pregnancy; she left her father and her husband in the lonely gray parsonage, which was surrounded by the churchyard and the wild moors that the Brontë children had come to love.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Jane Eyre

A strong-principled orphan girl who falls in love with Mr. Rochester, her employer. When she discovers that he is already married, to an insane woman, she flees across the moors. Eventually they are reunited.

Mrs. Reed

A typically mean and vicious, nineteenth-century "stepmother" to Jane. 恶毒

Eliza Reed

Mrs. Reed's elder daughter; a tight-fisted money lender. 吝啬

Georgiana Reed

Her mother's pink-cheeked, golden-haired pampered beauty. 娇纵, 娇生惯养

John Reed

A fourteen-year-old bully. 土霸

Abbot

Mrs. Reed's maid; an echo of her mistress.

Bessie Lee

A pretty nursemaid who is kind to Jane.

Robert Leaven

The coachman at Gateshead; he marries Bessie.

Mr. Lloyd

An apothecary; he is kind to Jane and intercedes for her that she may be sent away to school.

Mr. Brocklehurst

He seems "a black pillar" to Jane, intimidates his teachers, and hates Jane because she does not like Psalms.

Miss Temple

A contrast to Mr. Brocklehurst, she is everything Jane could want in a teacher.

Miss Miller

A young teacher with a great deal of responsibility.

Miss Smith

She helps the girls make their own clothes.

Miss Scatcherd

She is always scolding and punishing Helen Burns.

Madame Pierrot

She teaches French and is a rather likeable woman.

Helen Burns

An ill schoolmate of Jane's; she tries to show Jane the futility of hatred and revenge and the necessity of bearing what comes to one.

Mary Ann Wilson

Jane's playmate at Lowood.

Miss Gryce

Jane's roommate during part of her stay at Lowood.

Edward Rochester

The owner of Thornfield; Jane's new master. Mystery surrounds him. He is a headstrong man who mellows under Jane's love. He is finally blinded and maimed but is found by Jane and they are married at the end of the novel.

Adèle Varens

The little French girl for whom Jane is hired as governess; Mr. Rochester's ward, the child of his French mistress.

Mrs. Fairfax

She has charge of Thornfield when Mr. Rochester is away; she does not believe any good will come of Jane's friendship with Mr. Rochester.

Sophie

The French maid for Adèle; she speaks no English.

John and Mary

Servants at Thornfield, and also at Ferndean at the end of the novel.

Leah

A housemaid.

Grace Poole

From the first, she is a mystery; Jane does not understand what her job is and Grace is blamed for all the diabolical events around Thornfield.

Bertha Mason Rochester

The mad wife of Edward Rochester, she lives on the third floor of Thornfield Hall, guarded by Grace Poole.

Richard Mason

The brother of Bertha Mason, he prevents Jane's marrying Mr. Rochester.

Blanche Ingram

Handsome, haughty, cold, and shallow, Blanche wants to marry Mr. Rochester.

St. John Rivers

Clergyman in the parish at Morton. Impatient with his present position and his own affection for Rosamond Oliver, he struggles with himself and maintains a cold, almost inhuman attitude.

Mary and Diana Rivers

Sisters of St. John; both are gentle, kind girls.

Hannah

Suspicious servant of the Rivers family.

Rosamond Oliver

A beautiful but rather shallow girl; she fails to detract St. John from his religious mission.

Mr. Oliver

Rosamond's father; he represents the self-made man of the early nineteenth century.

Mr. Briggs

The solicitor who stops the marriage of Jane to Mr. Rochester.

SUMMARIES AND COMMENTARIES

SECTION ONE

CHAPTER I

Summary

Orphaned Jane lives in the hostile home of her aunt, Mrs. Reed, and cousins, John, Eliza and Georgiana. A bully, John throws a book at Jane. She falls, cutting her head. In a culmination of rage over past mistreatments, Jane attacks John. The family, including Bessie, the nurse, and Abbot, Mrs. Reed's maid, takes John's part and banishes Jane to the red room.

Commentary

The words "sombre," "leafless," "raw," "drear," and "lamentable" set the mood. The weather—"a drear November day"—parallels Jane's situation. Pictures that attract her interest strengthen her melancholy and foreshadow tragedy. Aside from Jane, the chief characters for this section of the book are introduced: Mrs. Reed, a tyrant; John, a bully; Eliza and Georgiana, self-centered girls; the

servants, followers of family sentiment. Desperation drives Jane, although she is only ten and alone in the world, to defy the whole household.

CHAPTER II

Summary

Bessie and Abbot drag Jane to the red room and lock her in. At first anger and indignation support her, then self-doubt and anguish take over. She sees herself in the mirror as half-fairy, half-imp.

Mr. Reed, her mother's brother, died in this room. Jane thinks if he were living, he could help her. Then she thinks he might come back in spirit. Her imagination fosters the idea and she interprets a moving light on the ceiling as her uncle's spirit. She screams. Bessie and Abbot come. Bessie sympathizes; Abbot accuses. Mrs. Reed condemns her to stay in the room. Jane's fear plunges her into unconsciousness.

Commentary

This chapter reveals a desperate, emotional Jane among unsympathetic and even cruel people. Only Bessie, out of the whole self-righteous group, pleads for her. The red room experience—being trapped in a room—will recur in Jane's life. In each case (except the one time she is in real danger) she has a psychic experience that shows her the way to proceed. The reference to a phantom will reappear as a motif throughout the book. This pattern of foreshadowing and repetition helps to give the book unity.

CHAPTER III

Summary

Jane awakens confused and terrified. As reason returns to her, she realizes that she is in the nursery and that someone is handling her with kindness, more kindness than she can ever remember. Her new friend, Mr. Lloyd, the apothecary, dismisses Bessie, and hears what has happened from Jane. He then recommends to Mrs. Reed that Jane go away to school. Jane learns from Bessie and Abbot's conversation that her mother married a poor clergyman, was disinherited for it and that both her parents died of typhus when she was a baby. Bessie sings a mournful song.

Commentary

Contrast appears in Jane's affection toward the impersonal but kind apothecary and her revulsion to the self-righteous, prejudiced

Reed household. Mood-words point up this contrast. In regard to Mr. Lloyd, such words are used, as: more tenderly, relief, protection and security. For the Reeds, Jane thinks: obnoxious, ceaseless reprimand, thanklessness, and inexpressible sadness. Jane's mental state shows in these words: ghastly, dread, wretchedness, eerie, morbid, and dreary. Her depression deepens with Bessie's sad ballad.

Jane's courage has been stiffened by suffering to the point where she confides in Mr. Lloyd, but her courage does not extend to embracing poverty, and she has enough self-knowledge, caution, and honesty to admit this.

Since Jane lives in practical banishment in the Reed household, her method of learning her history is by overhearing conversation. The reader should note the discussion of Jane's relatives because future plot developments hinge in part on this knowledge.

CHAPTER IV

Summary

Jane, isolated from the rest of the family, feels a change will be made in her situation. This idea is confirmed by the conversation between Abbot and Bessie. Jane finds courage to hit John, and to defy Mrs. Reed, and to accuse her of cruelty and injustice. November and December with their holidays pass without Jane's taking part in any festivities. She consoles herself with her doll and the occasional kindness of Bessie.

On January 15, Mr. Brocklehurst comes to talk about Jane's entering Lowood. A forbidding man, he questions Jane about her belief in hell and suggests that her sins are enough to put her there. When Mrs. Reed tells him Jane is deceitful, he expresses shock and says that she will go to perdition. In answer to further questioning, Jane finds courage enough to tell him she does not like the Psalms. Then after Brocklehurst has gone, Jane tells Mrs. Reed how cruel she has been. She frightens that self-centered woman and gains her first emotional victory, which soon fades into loneliness and despair.

Bessie, for once in an almost cheerful mood, finds Jane; when Jane refuses to be frightened at Bessie's cross command, the servant comforts the girl. She advises Jane to be more bold, says she likes Jane better than the others, and does not want her to be afraid.

Commentary

Jane's first emotional victory gained by defying Mrs. Reed gives her courage to reply to Bessie. The reader knows Lowood will be

difficult, but Jane's courage and spirit have strengthened. Also, in this chapter, there is humor in the contrast between Brocklehurst's theory of educating the poor young women to love poverty, whereas his own daughters adore silks, and his subsequent conversation with Mrs. Reed on consistency. There is additional humor in Mr. Brocklehurst's story about his own son preferring Psalms to gingerbread; all these incidents demonstrate that Mr. Brocklehurst lacks perception and sensitivity. Jane's humor shows in her idea of how to avoid hell; keep in good health and do not die. Note, too, that, Eliza reveals her greediness by charging her mother fifty to sixty percent usury, and Georgiana, vain and selfish, primps all the time and will not share her toys with Jane. Jane finds comfort in feeding the birds.

SECTION TWO

CHAPTER V

Summary

Only Bessie bids Jane goodbye. The fifty miles to Lowood seem endless. The first day at Lowood, Jane meets Miss Miller, an under-teacher, Miss Temple, superintendent, Miss Smith, Miss Scatcherd, Mme. Pierrot, and one girl with whom she talks. She likes Miss Temple best. The long day is filled with study, wretched food, and some unkindness. The school takes charity children—that is, orphans whose expenses cannot be fully paid by their relatives; the rest of the expenses are paid by contributions from the public. In Jane's uncertain mental and emotional state she feels far from Gateshead and unable to foresee the future.

Commentary

Reluctant to leave Bessie, Jane finds a heroine in Miss Temple. Otherwise, Jane's situation has not improved. Ill-fed and without kindness except from Miss Temple, Jane suffers for her new fellow student, the girl with the hollow cough. She will influence Jane's thought and attitude.

The mood of the chapter shows in such words, as: saddened, raw, chill, apprehensive, wild wind, dreary silence, furious gusts, bitter cold, wintry blast, brown decay, gloomy room. Words depicting Miss Temple are: grave, erect, tall, fair, shapely, benignant, light, stately. Insight into Miss Temple's character comes when she orders bread and cheese to make up for the burnt porridge.

Note the inconsistency between outward religious observance

and the lack of kindness in the school life. In writing about Lowood, Brontë describes the school for clergyman's daughters where two of Charlotte Brontë's sisters were so ill-treated that they soon died. Charlotte, herself, also attended the same school.

CHAPTER VI

Summary

The second day after Jane enters Lowood, the weather turns colder. With the water frozen, the girls cannot wash. Jane, hungry, cold, and bewildered, sees her new friend, Helen Burns, punished by Miss Scatcherd. Infuriated, Jane can however do nothing. Later at play period, Jane revels in the bad weather and in her isolation; but she seeks out Helen and they discuss their differing ideas of life. Helen admits her faults, but she bears no grudges. She counsels endurance and Christian forgiveness. Jane believes in loving those who love her, and in striking back at those who strike her. Helen's idea of eternity is a "rest, a mighty home."

Commentary

Conditions at Lowood become more clear: insufficient warmth, food and kindness. Two opposing philosophies are presented: Helen's idea of endurance and submitting to fate; Jane's of fighting against fate. Helen's preoccupation with death will prove significant.

Again Charlotte Brontë uses mood words: frozen, keen, shiver, perish with cold, disconsolate moan of the wind, gloom, darkness. The total mood of the chapter depresses the reader, but raises his confidence in Jane's fighting spirit. One should watch to see if Jane changes her philosophy of life as the book progresses.

CHAPTER VII

Summary

Winter worsens conditions at Lowood. The children spend an hour outdoors with insufficient clothing; they get chillblains and swollen feet. On Sunday they walk two miles through the cold to church and have a small bit of cold meat and bread between morning and afternoon services. After the services the wintry wind almost flays the skin from their faces as they walk home. The smaller children are crowded from the fire by the larger. The only solace is a whole slice of bread and a bit of butter instead of a half slice.

Three weeks after Jane's entry into school, Mr. Brocklehurst returns, full of concern over conserving thread and needles and over

darning stockings. He orders the too-abundant hair of the older girls to be cut off. In the middle of his lecture on the sin of indulging fleshly lusts, his wife and daughters come in dressed in silks and their hair in curls. Jane, who has been dreading his return, tries to hide but drops her slate and is singled out to stand on a stool in front of Brocklehurst. He tells the children she is a liar, that she is to be avoided and that no one shall speak to her that day. He orders her to stand on the stool another half hour. Jane remains almost crushed until Helen Burns walks by and smiles at her.

Commentary

Mr. Brocklehurst's hypocrisy, shown in Chapter IV, is dramatized by his cruel treatment of charity children as opposed to his indulgence of his own family. Charlotte Brontë, who was a clergyman's daughter, here holds up to scorn one type of religious hypocrisy.

Affairs at Lowood seem to be rising to some kind of climax. Jane's courage has grown so that she can withstand Brocklehurst's dreadful accusation.

CHAPTER VIII

Summary

Left alone, Jane can not throw off depression and she cries. Helen Burns comes to comfort her and to bring her food. Helen tells her the pupils would sympathize with her if they dared. Jane fears she has lost all the good reputation she has earned in her three weeks there. Miss Temple takes both girls to her room, feeds, and comforts them. She tells Jane she will be judged on her own merit. Miss Temple will write Mr. Lloyd for confirmation of Jane's story.

Helen and Miss Temple talk of many things strange to Jane: books and lands. Jane listens with amazement. Miss Temple seems worried about Helen's health. When the girls return to their bedroom, Miss Scatcherd scolds Helen and assigns her punishment. Within a week Jane's record is cleared by confirmation from Mr. Lloyd. Jane works harder than ever and finds particular pleasure in drawing and French.

Commentary

Helen's philosophy is that though all men condemn one, the angels see innocence (if there be innocence) and that one should not distress himself because "life is soon over and death is so certain an entrance to happiness—to glory." This might indicate Charlotte

Brontë's feeling in regard to her two sisters who died much as Helen will die. Jane's philosophy (probably Charlotte's) is that if others do not love her, she would rather die. Helen's resignation saddens Jane.

Action in this chapter reveals Miss Temple as a friend to both Helen and Jane. She has them up for tea and clears Jane's name. Miss Temple's confidence in her brings Jane a measure of happiness at Lowood. The teacher's concern for Helen's health foreshadows tragedy.

CHAPTER IX

Summary

Spring comes. Suffering from cold weather ends, but typhus strikes the orphanage. Many die. Some leave. Discipline relaxes. Jane wanders free in the fields with a new friend, Mary Ann Wilson.

Meanwhile Helen Burns is dying of consumption. One night when Jane sees the doctor's pony by the door, she discovers he has been to see Helen and realizes Helen's fatal illness. Jane sneaks up to Miss Temple's room, where Helen lies, and crawls into the crib with her. They talk of death. Helen has complete faith and trust. The girls embrace, fall asleep, and in the morning Helen is dead. An attendant carries Jane to her own room.

Commentary

Contrast appears here first in the comparison of winter with spring at Lowood, then, in the comparison of Jane's new freedoms with the old restrictions; and finally in the comparison of Jane's life outside with the fever-ridden, death-smelling corridors. When Helen dies, Jane's feeling that the present is only a little island in a chaotic abyss is contrasted with Helen's absolute faith in the continuity of life.

CHAPTER X

Summary

This chapter covers eight years. After the typhus plague, investigation reveals sordid conditions at Lowood, which new buildings and new management improve. Jane continues as a pupil for six years longer, and as a teacher for two more. When Miss Temple marries and leaves, Jane's motive for staying at Lowood is gone. Restlessness comes over her and she prays for a new servitude: anything else seems too much to ask.

Somehow the idea comes into her mind that she should

advertise, and she obtains a position as a governess. When queried, Mrs. Reed says she does not care what Jane does. The day before Jane's departure, Bessie comes to tell her of the Reeds. Eliza and Georgiana quarrel while Mrs. Reed worries about the dissipated John. A relative of Jane's father has inquired about her seven years previously.

Bessie indicates that while she does not think Jane beautiful, she thinks her a lady with accomplishments (beyond those of the Reed girls) in art, music and French.

Commentary

This chapter closes the first eighteen years of Jane's life, brings the reader up to date on the Reed family, foreshadows trouble for the Reeds, and indicates that Jane does have a living relative on her father's side. Jane's request for a new "servitude" is characteristic and prophetic. Bessie's reaction to Jane's physical appearance and accomplishments impresses upon the reader Jane's ordinary appearance and her gentility and charm. Note here the hint at psychic guidance in Jane's decision to advertise for a position. At every crisis in her life there will be some such guidance.

SECTION THREE

CHAPTER XI

Summary

Jane waits in the Inn at Millcote after a sixteen hour ride from Lowood. Apprehensive because no one has met her, she finally inquires at the bar and finds a man has been waiting for her. She gets into the conveyance for a two-hour ride to Thornfield. Mrs. Fairfax, the housekeeper whom Jane thinks at first to be the owner, greets her cordially. Jane finds out that her pupil will be Adèle Varens, not related to Mrs. Fairfax, but a ward of Mr. Rochester, the owner and master of the house. In addition, the household contains Leah, a maid; John, the coachman and his wife; Sophie, Adèle's French nurse; and Grace Poole.

Jane tries to get some idea of the character of Mr. Rochester, but Mrs. Fairfax only says he is a good master but somewhat peculiar. Mrs. Fairfax shows Jane the three floors of the house, the attic, and the roof. While on the third floor, Jane hears a strange laugh which would have scared her had it not been daylight and had not Mrs. Fairfax explained that the noise came from Grace Poole, who was eccentric.