



JANE EYRE

YORK NOTES FOR GCSE

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CHARLOTTE BRONTË

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JANE EYRE

江苏工业学院图书馆

藏书章

CHARLOTTE BRONTË

NOTES BY SARAH ROWBOTHAM



Longman



York Press

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YORK PRESS

322 Old Brompton Road, London SW5 9JH

PEARSON EDUCATION LIMITED

Edinburgh Gate, Harlow,

Essex CM20 2JE, United Kingdom

Associated companies, branches and representatives throughout the world

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First published 1997

This new and fully revised edition first published 2002

Third impression 2004

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

ISBN 0-582-50621-2

Designed by Michelle Cannatella

Illustrated by Tony Chance

Typeset by Land & Unwin (Data Sciences), Bugbrooke, Northamptonshire

Produced by Pearson Education Asia Limited, Hong Kong

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PREFACE

York Notes are designed to give you a broader perspective on works of literature studied at GCSE and equivalent levels. With examination requirements changing in the twenty-first century, we have made a number of significant changes to this new series. We continue to help students to reach their own interpretations of the text but York Notes now have important extra-value new features.

You will discover that York Notes are genuinely interactive. The new **Checkpoint** features make sure that you can test your knowledge and broaden your understanding. You will also be directed to excellent websites, books and films where you can follow up ideas for yourself.

The **Resources** section has been updated and an entirely new section has been devoted to how to improve your grade. Careful reading and application of the principles laid out in the Resources section guarantee improved performance.

The **Detailed summaries** include an easy-to-follow skeleton structure of the story-line, while the section on **Language and style** has been extended to offer an in-depth discussion of the writer's techniques.

The Contents page shows the structure of this study guide. However, there is no need to read from the beginning to the end as you would with a novel, play or poem. Use the Notes in the way that suits you. Our aim is to help you with your understanding of the work, not to dictate how you should learn.

Our authors are practising English teachers and examiners who have used their experience to offer a whole range of **Examiner's secrets** – useful hints to encourage exam success.

The General Editor of this series is John Polley, Senior GCSE Examiner and former Head of English at Harrow Way Community School, Andover.

The author of these Notes, Sarah Rowbotham, is currently an English examiner for one of the largest examination bodies. She is Head of English at a comprehensive school in Sheffield. Her previous York Notes titles are *Nineteenth Century Short Stories*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Emma*. She is also the author of the York Personal Tutor on *Shakespeare*.

The text used in these Notes is the new Penguin Classics edition, published 1996, edited by Micheal Mason.

INTRODUCTION

HOW TO STUDY A NOVEL

A novelist starts with a story that examines a situation and the actions of particular characters. Remember that authors are not photographers, and that a novel *never* resembles real life exactly. Ultimately, a novel represents a view of the world that has been created in the author's imagination.

There are six features of a novel:

- 1 THE STORY: this is the series of events, deliberately organised by the writer to test the characters
- 2 THE CHARACTERS: the people who have to respond to the events of the story. Since they are human, they can be good or bad, clever or stupid, likeable or detestable, etc. They may change too!
- 3 THE VIEWPOINT/VOICE: who is telling the story. The viewpoint may come from one of the characters, or from an omniscient (all-seeing) narrator, which allows the novelist to write about the perspectives of all the characters
- 4 THE THEMES: these are the underlying messages, or meanings, of the novel
- 5 THE SETTING: this concerns the time and place that the author has chosen for the story
- 6 THE LANGUAGE AND STYLE: these are the words that the author has used to influence our understanding of the novel

To arrive at the fullest understanding of a novel, you need to read it several times. In this way, you can see how all the choices the author has made add up to a particular view of life, and develop your own ideas about it.

The purpose of these York Notes is to help you understand what the novel is about and to enable you to make your own interpretation. Do not expect the study of a novel to be neat and easy: novels are chosen for examination purposes, not written for them!

**WWW. CHECK
THE NET**

**www.victorianweb
.org** has lots of
information on
Charlotte Brontë and
her works

AUTHOR – LIFE AND WORKS

- 1816** Birth of Charlotte Brontë
- 1817** Birth of Charlotte's brother, Branwell Brontë
- 1818** Charlotte's sister, Emily, is born
- 1819** The Brontë family move to Haworth in Yorkshire
- 1820** Anne Brontë is born
- 1821** Charlotte Brontë's mother dies of cancer
- 1824** Two of Charlotte's sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, die of tuberculosis at Cowan Bridge School
- 1831** Charlotte boards at Roe Head School, Mirfield
- 1835** Charlotte returns to Roe Head as a teacher; initially, her sister Emily is a pupil
- 1839** Charlotte, now a governess, turns down two proposals of marriage
- 1841** Charlotte becomes governess to a family near Bradford

CONTEXT

- 1815** Napoleon becomes Emperor and is defeated at Waterloo
- 1816** Jane Austen's *Emma* is published
- 1817** Jane Austen dies
- 1820** George III dies, and George IV becomes king
- 1821** John Keats dies
- 1824** Lord Byron dies
- 1825** First railway opened between Stockton and Darlington
- 1830** George IV dies and is succeeded by William IV
- 1831** Cholera epidemic
- 1832** Walter Scott dies; First Reform Act
- 1833** Slavery abolished
- 1834** Tolpuddle martyrs
- 1837** William IV dies, and Queen Victoria comes to the throne
- 1838** 'People's Charter' published
- 1839** Chartist petition rejected by Parliament; riots in Birmingham
- 1840** Penny Post is established

AUTHOR – LIFE AND WORKS

1842 Charlotte and Emily study French in Brussels

1844 Charlotte returns home when her father becomes almost totally blind

1847 *Jane Eyre* is published under an author named Currer Bell. *Wuthering Heights* by Charlotte Brontë’s sister, Emily, is published

1848 Charlotte’s brother Branwell dies of alcoholism; her sister Emily dies of tuberculosis. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Charlotte Brontë’s sister, Anne, is published

1849 Charlotte Brontë’s sister Anne dies of tuberculosis; Charlotte publishes *Shirley*

1853 Charlotte Brontë publishes *Villette*, based on her experiences in Brussels

1854 Charlotte marries her father’s curate, Arthur Nicholls

1855 Charlotte, who is pregnant, dies of pneumonia

CONTEXT

1842 Second Chartist petition presented and rejected

1845 Famine in Ireland due to potato blight

1848 Revolutions in Europe

1849 Cholera epidemic

1851 The Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace

1852 Harriet Beecher Stowe publishes *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

1854 Cholera epidemic in England

SETTING AND BACKGROUND

THE WEATHER

The setting of *Jane Eyre* is vital to the plot and action, and often gives the reader an added dimension which helps our understanding of character and scene.

Consider the ways in which Charlotte Brontë involves the weather in the novel: there are numerous examples of climatic conditions intensifying mood (pathetic fallacy). The bleak view from the window in the opening section reinforces the idea of little Jane's unhappiness; 'a scene of wet lawn and storm-beat shrub, with ceaseless rain sweeping away wildly before a long and lamentable blast' (Ch. 1, p. 14). The freezing conditions at Lowood add to the misery there in the same way that the storm in the Thornfield orchard on the night of Rochester's proposal gives a feeling of foreboding.

Charlotte Brontë was very much influenced by writers of Gothic fiction, with its melodrama, haunted and gloomy castles, and innocent heroines. Thornfield is vaguely threatening with its sombre rooms hung with tapestry, its strange noises and mysterious secrets, and fits into this genre very well: 'I lingered in the long passage ... narrow, low, and dim, with only one little window at the far end ... like a corridor in some Bluebeard's castle' (Ch. 11, p. 122).

SURROUNDINGS

Houses and possessions are used to add information about characters. The Rivers are not wealthy and yet Jane approves of their home because it typifies the values of cleanliness and common sense:

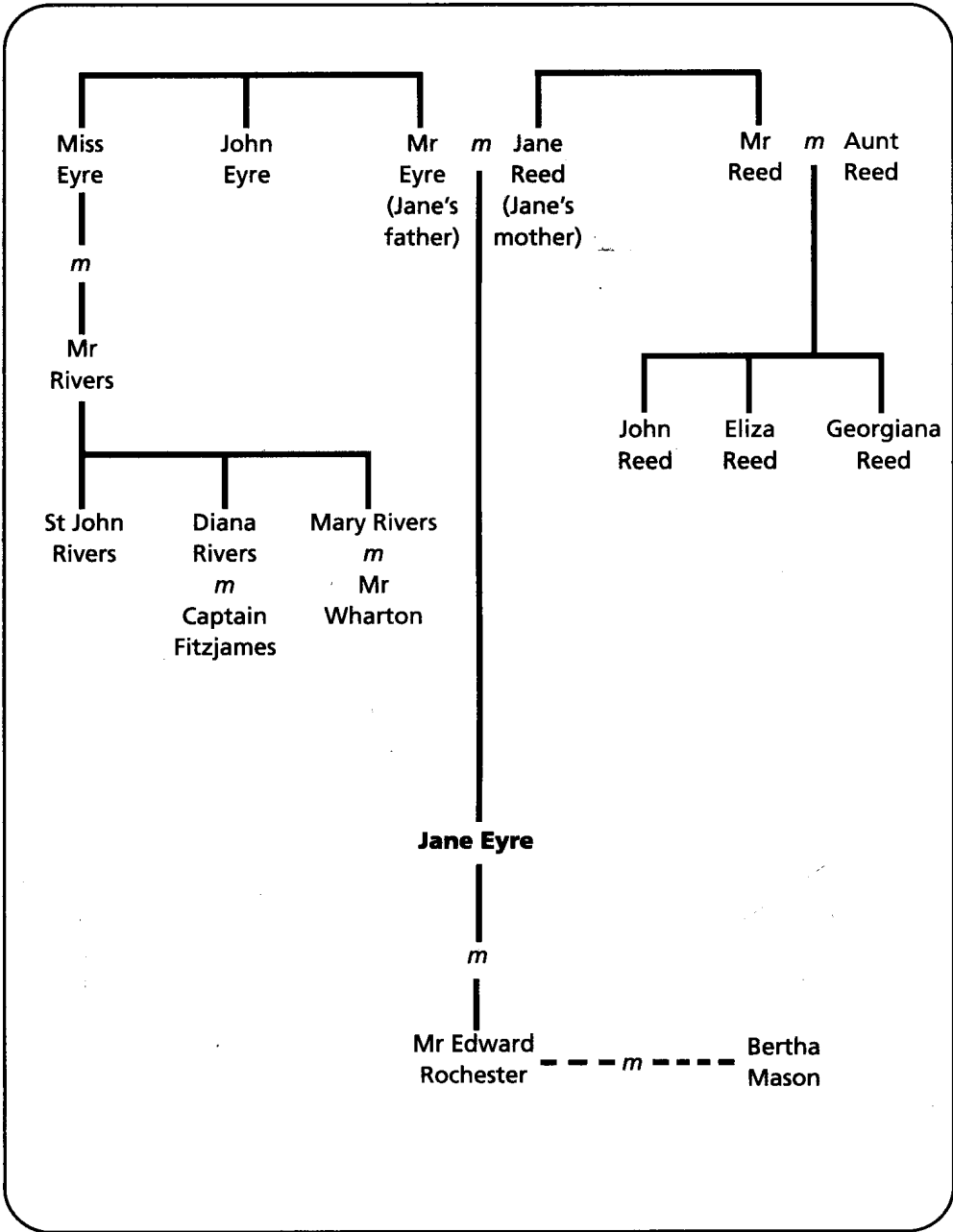
'The parlour was rather a small room, very plainly furnished; yet comfortable, because clean and neat. The old-fashioned chairs were very bright, and the walnut-wood table was like a looking-glass ... everything – including the carpet and curtains – looked at once well worn and well saved'. (Ch. 29, p. 385)

She is much more at home in this kind of environment than at the grand houses of Gateshead or Thornfield, and it is logical that she and Rochester should eventually settle at Ferndean Manor which is much less imposing than Thornfield Hall.



DID YOU KNOW?

Charlotte Brontë based Thornfield Hall on a real place she had visited as a governess.



1

Ten-year-old Jane Eyre is orphaned and lives with her cruel aunt, Mrs Reed, and three cousins, Eliza, John and Georgiana. Jane is wrongly punished and locked in the 'red-room'. Jane is terrified and passes out.

2

After her 'fit' Mr Lloyd, an apothecary, visits Jane and they talk about her depression. He recommends that Jane should leave Gateshead and attend a boarding school.

3

Jane is sent away to Lowood charity school where the pupils are treated appallingly. Jane forms alliances with her teacher, Miss Temple, and fellow-student, Helen Burns.

4

There is an outbreak of typhus and Helen dies. People become aware of the harsh conditions at Lowood and it is taken over and improved. Jane passes six happy years there as a pupil, then two as a teacher.

5

Jane becomes a governess at Thornfield, owned by Mr Rochester. Jane settles in well, but does not meet Rochester until one day she assists him when he has fallen off his horse. Jane is not immediately aware that he is her employer.

6

At first Rochester is rude and gruff towards Jane, but she is not intimidated by him. In time, Rochester becomes resident at Thornfield and the pair talk together more often. They become attracted to one another. Jane saves Rochester's life.

7

Rochester leaves Thornfield for a while and returns with a rich and beautiful companion, Blanche Ingram. Jane becomes jealous when she believes they are to marry. Jane goes to see her dying aunt and Jane forgives her past behaviour.

8

When Jane returns, Rochester denies his engagement to Miss Ingram. Then, despite the differences in their age and status, Rochester asks Jane to marry him. Jane is very happy.

9

On the day of their wedding, Jane discovers that Rochester is already married. Rochester leads them to the house and reveals his wife, a mad woman who is being kept in the attic.

10

Jane refuses to be Rochester's mistress and leaves Thornfield. She is destitute and is saved by three people who turn out to be her cousins (Diana, Mary and St John). Jane becomes a teacher at a new local school and settles in to her new life.

11

Jane inherits some money from an uncle and shares it with her cousins. St John proposes marriage to Jane, even though he does not love her. He believes that she would be a good missionary's wife. Jane refuses as she still loves Rochester.

12

One night, Jane hears Rochester calling and returns to Thornfield. She discovers that Mrs Rochester has burned down the house and has died. Rochester has been maimed and blinded. The novel ends with his marriage to Jane and a description of the happy life ahead of them.

SUMMARIES

? DID YOU KNOW?
Many of the details of Jane Eyre's childhood are drawn from the author's own life.

- **GENERAL SUMMARY**
- **CHAPTERS 1–4: GATESHEAD – THE ORPHANED**
- **EARLY YEARS**
- Jane Eyre is an orphan. Both her parents have died within a year of her birth, leaving her to the care of an aunt, Mrs Reed of Gateshead. Mrs Reed is a widow, whose husband was the brother of Jane's mother. Before his death he made his wife promise to care for the child. Mrs Reed keeps her promise only narrowly: she feeds, clothes and houses the little girl. She resents her, however, and treats her cruelly. As the novel opens, Jane is ten years old, withdrawn and unloved, but high-spirited and with a strong sense of justice. She resents the harsh treatment from her aunt and cousins, and has severe temper outbursts, which shock and outrage Mrs Reed so much that she arranges for Jane to be sent away to school.
- **CHAPTERS 5–10: LOWOOD – SCHOOL**
- Jane spends eight years at Lowood, a charity boarding school. To start with it is a hard life. Living conditions are terrible: there is never enough food or heating, and many children become ill and die from typhus fever. Mr Brocklehurst, the head of the institution, is a cruel man whose misguided religious ideas about how to build character and feed the soul are soon criticised by the general population. The school is taken over by kinder people; and Jane flourishes under better conditions and sound teaching. She becomes one of the teachers herself, respected and loved, with a strong sense of personal integrity.
- **CHAPTERS 11–27: THORNFIELD – LIFE AND LOVE**
- **BEGIN**
- Aged eighteen, she seeks a job as governess in a private household. She comes to Thornfield, home of Mr Rochester and his ward. Mr Rochester, some twenty-five years older than her, returns home after a long absence. He meets and falls in love with Jane. Despite the difference in their social rank he wants to marry her. Just at the point

when the fairytale is about to become reality – actually at the altar – the marriage is halted by an announcement that Mr Rochester already has a wife. This discovery of ‘the madwoman in the attic’ nearly destroys Jane along with her hopes of happiness. In spite of Mr Rochester’s pleas and protestations and her devoted love for him, she will not agree to be his mistress. She flees Thornfield.

CHAPTERS 28–35: MARCH END – ADULthood AND THE ROAD TO KNOWLEDGE

Penniless and almost starving, Jane wanders the countryside looking for work and food. She stumbles upon a house one night when she is just running out of strength. The occupants let her in and save her from death. St John, Diana and Mary Rivers look after her and they become her family. It turns out that they are in fact cousins. Jane receives an inheritance and insists on sharing it with them, allowing her to repay their kindness and enabling all four to become financially independent at last.

During Jane’s long months away from Thornfield, Mr Rochester has never left her thoughts. She knows that whilst he has a wife living she can never be with him, and mourns the loss of their love deeply. St John proposes marriage and invites her to travel with him to India to be a missionary. She considers this, but the desire to be near Mr Rochester keeps her in England. One night, when she is being pressed by St John into making a decision, she ‘hears’ a voice crying for her in despair.

CHAPTERS 36–8: THE JOURNEY HOME

She returns to Thornfield, finding it a blackened ruin and the mad Mrs Rochester dead. She finds Mr Rochester, now blinded and partially crippled. The novel ends with their marriage and the prospect of a peaceful, contented life ahead.



DID YOU KNOW?

The words ‘Reader, I married him’ (Ch. 38, p. 498) are the most famous in the novel.

DETAILED SUMMARIES

CHAPTER 1 – Jane lets fly at Master John

- ① Jane Eyre lives in a grand house with her aunt and cousins.
- ② She is unhappy and hides away to read.
- ③ Her cousin John discovers her and is abusive.
- ④ Jane is punished for her angry outburst by being locked in the 'red-room' (p. 18).

At the opening of the novel Jane Eyre is ten years old. She is an orphan and lives in a very grand house with her aunt, Mrs Reed, and this lady's three children: Master John, Eliza and Georgiana. We quickly discover that Jane is a most unhappy little girl.

From the start her sense of loneliness and isolation is evident in the way she hides herself behind thick curtains in a deserted room, ostracised by her aunt and cousins. She muses on her relief that the weather is too inclement for any possibility of a walk, and spends her time studying a book, Bewick's *History of British Birds*, whose pictures fascinate her. Note how the pictures in the book add to the creation of mood.



? DID YOU KNOW?

Charlotte Brontë's mother, like Jane Eyre's, died when the author was very young.

When she is discovered there by cousin John, he is cruel and abusive to her. Her resulting anger and refusal to be dominated are severely punished – Mrs Reed declares, ‘Take her away to the red-room, and lock her in there’ (p. 18).

It is quickly clear that Jane has a strong personality and is beginning to question the behaviour and attitudes of those around her. Although young, she refuses to be dominated by her elder, male cousin; she recognises him for the bully that he is and stands up to his cruelty.

Her independence and strength of character is shown in well-defined opinions. Lashing out verbally and physically at cousin John is a sign of her strong nature and desire to be treated fairly.

The weather outside is cold, wet and miserable: ‘near, a scene of wet lawn and storm-beat shrub, with ceaseless rain sweeping away wildly before a long and lamentable blast’ (p. 14). There is **pathetic fallacy** in the reflection of Jane’s situation in the miserable weather. Also the gloomy pictures in the book fascinate her as they also mirror her situation.

**EXAMINER'S SECRET**

A sign of a good candidate is the ability to cross-reference, e.g. provide evidence of Jane’s independence from different parts of the novel.

CHAPTER 2 – The horrors of the red-room

- 1 Jane is carried to the red-room.**
- 2 She is terrified in this room, where her uncle died.**
- 3 As it grows dark, she screams out.**
- 4 Mrs Reed refuses to let her leave the room.**
- 5 Jane passes out from terror.**

Bessie and Abbot carry Jane to the red-room.

This is obviously a terrible punishment to inflict upon a little girl. She is clearly desperate and very afraid, but Mrs Reed has absolutely no sympathy for her. Seen through Jane’s eyes she is clearly a cruel woman; however, even Jane admits that Mrs Reed sincerely believes that Jane is artful and wicked, therefore it is a just punishment in this lady’s eyes.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Charlotte Brontë was not the only writer in her family. Her sisters Emily and Anne were also novelists.

Jane's personality becomes clearer in this chapter; at ten years old she is able to look at her situation and judge it very honestly. She recognises that it is not her fault that she is being punished, and that her aunt and cousins resent her terribly for being an unwanted burden. She sees their cruelty and is very angry – “Unjust! – unjust!” said my reason’ (p. 22).

The red-room

The red-room is an old disused bedroom. It was here that Mrs Reed's husband, Jane's uncle, died some nine years before. Jane is clearly terrified about the prospect of being locked in this room with all its gloomy associations. (Note the author's use of descriptive language about the setting.) Initially she bears her punishment with fortitude. She is still extremely distressed and angry, and ponders on the unjust treatment she habitually receives from her family. She accepts that she is unwanted and unloved and does not fit in at Gateshead at all. As it begins to grow dark she becomes more aware and more afraid of her surroundings. She becomes convinced that the room is haunted and screams out for help. Although the servants come to her aid, they are unsympathetic, and Mrs Reed insists that Jane be thrust bodily back inside the room and the door locked behind her. At this point Jane faints – ‘I suppose I had a species of fit’ (p. 25) – in sheer terror.

An interesting interpretation of the ‘red’ room relates to the colour associations with anger – Jane's pent-up fury which is caused by her treatment at the hands of the Reeds.

CHAPTER 3 – Jane would like to go to school

- ① Jane wakes up in her own bed.
- ② She realises Bessie and Mr Lloyd are also there.
- ③ The apothecary comes back and questions her.
- ④ He recognises she is unhappy and should perhaps be sent away to school.