

# JANE EYRE

## KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

**Context** – *Jane Eyre* was written by Charlotte Brontë and was published in 1847.

**Charlotte Brontë** – Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) was an English novelist and poet. She was the eldest of the three Brontë sisters who survived into adulthood and whose novels became literature classics.



Two of Charlotte's sisters died in childhood, from an outbreak of tuberculosis at the Brontë's school in Cowan Bridge. The remaining siblings were thus brought home. Throughout her early adult life, Charlotte worked both as a school teacher and a private governess. However, finding herself disappointed with these roles, she set about initiating her own school with her sisters: Emily and Anne. Whilst the school proved to be ultimately unsuccessful (they failed to attract enough students), the literary careers of the three sisters flourished – each producing masterpieces (Charlotte's was *Jane Eyre*) in 1847.

There are several autobiographical elements interwoven throughout the novel. Jane's experience at Lowood School, where her best friend dies of tuberculosis, is mirrored in the death of Charlotte's sisters at Cowan Bridge. Mr Brocklehurst is partially based on Reverend Carus Wilson, the Evangelical minister in charge of Cowan Bridge. John Reed's decline into alcoholism is most likely a reflection of the downfall of Charlotte's brother – Branwell. Finally, like Jane, Charlotte was a governess: an excellent vantage point for witnessing the oppressive social ideas and practices of Victorian society.

**The Victorian Era** – The Victorian era, in which Queen Victoria sat on the English throne, was between 1837 and 1901. Whilst this was a time of industrial revolution, it was also an extremely harsh time to live, and the differences between the lives of the richest and the poorest were exacerbated. The Victorian era was a period of great change: the population of England doubled from 16.8 million 1851 to over 30 million in 1901.



**Class and Gender Divides** – Despite industrial changes altering the social landscape, there were still relatively distinct social classes in operation. Life remained terrible for the poor, many of whom lived in severe poverty. Old inheritance laws ensured that wealth remained within families. Similarly, persisting laws and attitudes ensured that most women remained oppressed in society, denied the same rights/ opportunities as men. Strict social structures dictated who it was proper to speak to, befriend and marry, which few were prepared to forsake.



**Health and Medicine** – Healthcare was more of a luxury at the time, and medicine was nowhere near as advanced today. Diseases were rife, and childbirth and poverty were very real mortality risks. As a result, middle class people may expect to live to 45 at the time, whereas a working class person would have been lucky to live half that time. In *Jane Eyre*, Jane's parents and best friend die prematurely of now-curable ailments.



**Main Characters** – Consider what Brontë intended through her characterisation of each of the below...

**Jane Eyre** – The dignified and passionate lead protagonist in the novel. Raised an orphan, Jane must overcome several threats to her integrity, autonomy and emotional wellbeing throughout the novel. She is forced to contend with oppression and hardship, at different points, yet her principled approach and devotion to equality challenges Victorian prejudices against women and the poor.

**Edward Rochester** – Rochester is a stern, wealthy, passionate man, whose dark secret generates much of the novel's suspense. Jane's employer at Thornfield, Rochester is unconventional in that he neglects rigid customs of class and propriety in order to interact with Jane. His problems, largely the result of his reckless behaviour when young, have caused him significant suffering throughout his life.

**Quote:** "I am no bird, and no net ensnares me." (2.8, p6)

**Quote:** "my equal is here...Jane, will you marry me?" (2.8, p87)

**Mrs Reed** – Mrs Reed is Jane's cruel aunt, who raises Jane at Gateshead Hall until she moves away to school age 10. She favours her own children over Jane, and treats her harshly. An example of this is after Jane's dispute with John, and she is locked in the red room as punishment. Mrs Reed resents the fact that others favour Jane over her children. Later on in her life, Jane attempts to reconcile with her aunt. However, Mrs Reed continues to begrudge her.

**Helen Burns** – Helen is Jane's best friend at Lowood School. She endures a miserable life at Lowood with a passivity that Jane cannot comprehend. Whilst Mr Brocklehurst preaches a type of evangelical form of religion that takes away peoples' pleasure and pride, Helen embodies a form of Christianity that is tolerant and accepting. She dies a premature and tragic death, of consumption (a term for the wasting away of the body – most commonly from tuberculosis).

**Quote:** "she was resolved to consider me bad to the last" (2.6, p10)

**Quote:** "If your own conscience approved, you would not be without friends. (1.8, p11)

**Bertha Mason** – Bertha is Rochester's insane first wife, locked away on the third floor of Thornfield. She is treated as if she is less than human, locked away from the world. She is half-creole – her character reveals a great deal about Victorian prejudices of other ethnicities. She suffers from congenital madness, yet Rochester suggests that her drunkenness and promiscuity in youth turned her mad. In any case, it is clear that the two never really got along, and didn't seem to know each other well before becoming married.

**St. John Rivers** – St. John is Jane's cousin, and is like her in the sense that he too is trying to find his place and purpose in life. St. John desires to marry Jane, and is often considered the foil to Rochester: whereas marriage to Rochester would represent the abandonment of principle in order to fulfil passion, marriage to St. John would mean that she sacrifices her passion for principle. Accompanying St. John to India would give her the chance to make a meaningful contribution to society, but to do so she would have to forsake love.

**Quote:** "When is your turn to come?" (43.27)

**Quote:** "you do not know what it is to possess... wealth" (3.7)

**Themes** – A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text.

**Love vs Freedom** – At its core, *Jane Eyre* is a tale of the titular character's quest to be loved. However, she has to learn to do so without sacrificing her autonomy in the process. Her fear of doing so is what influences her towards rejecting Rochester's initial proposal – she worries that doing so whilst he is still legally married would render her a mistress, and diminish her rights. Conversely, at Moor House, she maintains independence, but desires love. Only after proving her self-sufficiency to herself, does she enter into a partnership of equality with Rochester.

**Religion** – Jane also experiences an inner struggle in finding a balance between moral duties and pleasure. Three religious figures – Mr Brocklehurst, Helen Burns, and St. John Rivers each represent (and in some cases, attempt to enforce) their own models of religion. However, Jane ultimately rejects each in order to construct her own ideas regarding faith and duty, staying loyal to herself.



**Society and Class** – Jane's position between classes enables Brontë to portray a vast social landscape in the novel. She uses it to condemn the nature of the Victorian class hierarchy. Those with wealth and status are often the ones who are the most judgmental and morally inept, who fail to see Brontë's viewpoint: personal virtues are far better indicators of character than wealth or class.

**Education** – Jane strives to be as educated as possible. She understands that education gives her the best chance of social mobility, as it has the power to improve knowledge, character and prospects. Jane's education, in music performance, art, and foreign languages, may be somewhat shallow, but her learning does offer her a safe haven from the hardships of the world.



**Chapter-by-Chapter Summary** – Alongside key quotations from each chapter.

<b>Chapters 1-3</b>	10-year old orphan, Jane, is reading a book by a window, when her cousin John barges in and pushes her over. For the first time in her life, Jane fights back. She is accused by Mrs Reed of starting the fight, and is locked in the red room, where Mr Reed died 9 years earlier. There she believes she sees his ghost. Mrs Reed doesn't believe her and keeps her locked in. She faints. She is cared for by Bessie and Mr Lloyd. She tells them of her mistreatment. Mr Lloyd gets Mrs Reed to agree to Jane going to school.	"You have no business to take our books; you are a dependant, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us."
<b>Chapters 4-6</b>	Mrs Reed lies to Jane's new headmaster, Mr Brocklehurst, telling him that Jane is a liar. Jane scolds her. Her remaining time at Gateshead is miserable, but Bessie takes care of her. Jane begins at Lowood School, where conditions are tough. She notes the kindness of Ms Maria Temple. Jane befriends Helen Burns. Jane watches Helen's suffering, particularly at the hands of Mr Scatcherd, and wonders how she bears the pain and humiliation so quietly. Helen shares her belief of a beautiful afterlife.	"Ere I had finished this reply, my soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I ever felt."
<b>Chapters 7-9</b>	Mr Brocklehurst makes visits to the school, berating the kindness of Ms Temple. He labels Jane as deceitful in front of everyone. Ms Temple later writes to Mr Lloyd in order to clear Jane's name. Because of this, Jane studies with new vigour, excelling in French and art. Damp conditions in spring bring typhus – many students die, others are sent home. Helen dies of tuberculosis in Jane's arms.	"I resolved, in the depth of my heart, that I would be most moderate ... I told her all the story of my sad childhood."
<b>Chapters 10-13</b>	The epidemic reveals the depravity at Lowood, and Mr Brocklehurst is removed. Jane flourishes, graduating first in her class and becoming a teacher. Bessie tells her that she has achieved far more than any of the Reed children. Jane finds out that her family was middle class, which pleases her. Jane gets a job as governess at Thornfield. The kindly head housekeeper, Mrs Fairfax, shows her around. She meets her new student, the hyperactive Adele Varens, whom she soon enjoys teaching. She notes strange laughter on the third floor, which allows her imagination to wander. She begins to contemplate how women are restrained in society. Jane meets Rochester as he returns home. Jane and Adele join Rochester for tea, speaking of Adele's progress and Jane's art. She finds him abrupt.	"While I paced softly on, the last sound I expected to hear in so still a region, a laugh, struck my ear. It was a curious laugh; distinct, formal, mirthless. I stopped: the sound ceased, only for an instant; it began again, louder: for at first, though distinct, it was very low."
<b>Chapters 14-16</b>	After not seeing him for some time, Rochester invites Jane to dinner, where he speaks amiably to her. She tells him he is not handsome, but secretly admires his eyes. He expresses his belief in treating people admirably. He discusses improving himself from his past behaviour. Later, Rochester tells Jane of how Adele became his ward. That night, Jane hears the strange laughter, and upon investigation sees Rochester's curtains on fire. She douses the fire, saving his life. He is grateful. Soon, he leaves for a nearby estate of aristocrats, including the beautiful Blanche Ingram. Jane feels sorrow.	"I don't think, sir, you have a right to command me, merely because you are older than I, or because you have seen more of the world than I have."
<b>Chapters 17-20</b>	Jane realises that Grace, the servant blamed for the strange goings on, appears normal, and is paid well. Rochester returns with a group of people, including Blanche, who crassly tries to win his heart. An old fortune teller turns up, telling the disappointed Blanche that Rochester is not rich. The gypsy calls Jane, and is revealed to actually be Rochester in disguise. She promises him she would always stand by him. Mr Mason, a friend of Mr Rochester, is injured by the mystery presence. Later, Rochester later speaks to Jane of his earlier transgressions and wish for regeneration – why he must marry Blanche.	"What crime was this that lived incarnate in this sequestered mansion, and could neither be expelled nor subdued by the owner?—what mystery, that broke out now in fire and now in blood, at the dearest hours of night?"
<b>Chapters 21-24</b>	Jane learns that John Reed committed suicide and that Mrs Reed is dying. Jane returns to Gateshead and attempts to reconcile with her aunt, who still resents her. She admits to Jane that she denied her uncle custody of her, out of spite. She later dies. On her return to Thornfield, Rochester buys a new carriage – she assumes to woo Blanche. To her surprise, he later reveals that he has been just trying to make her jealous, and proposes to her. She agrees and they kiss. That night, lightning destroys the tree where he proposed. Over the next weeks, Jane worries about how their marriage will be unequal.	"I am strangely glad to get back again to you: and wherever you are is my home—my only home."
<b>Chapters 25-27</b>	Jane has strange dreams that include waiting for Rochester, holding a baby, and a strange woman with a distorted face. At the wedding, a lawyer (Mr Briggs) comes forward and reveals that Rochester is already married. His first wife, Bertha, is insane, and lives on the third floor of Thornfield. Jane is shocked to meet her, she is aggressive, appears half-woman, half-animal, and is cared for by Grace. Rochester tells Jane the full story. She considers staying, but fears becoming his mistress, so leaves.	"What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal."
<b>Chapters 28-31</b>	Jane soon runs out of money. At a nearby village, work is scarce. She is initially rejected when seeking refuge from the Rivers sisters, but their brother St. John insists they give her food and a warm bed. Jane is semi-conscious for 3 days. On the 4th, she awakes and criticises Hannah for initially turning her away. Hannah apologises, revealing that their father just died, and they are not wealthy. They commit to looking after Jane. Jane quickly befriends Mary and Diana, and they discuss books and art – however they then leave to become governesses in wealthy households. St. John gets Jane a job running a small parish school. Although she feels a little degraded, she is proud to be doing good.	"This was the climax. A pang of exquisite suffering—a throe of true despair—rent and heaved my heart. Worn out, indeed, I was; not another step could I stir. I sank on the wet doorstep: I groaned – I wrung my hands—I wept in utter anguish."
<b>Chapters 32-34</b>	Jane becomes respected in the community, but is still stirred by dreams of Rochester. Jane sees that St. John loves Rosamond, paints him a picture of her and suggests that he marries her. He shares how he does not feel that Rosamond would take well to missionary work – he will not exchange his beliefs for earthly delights. St. John sees Jane's real name on the picture, and realises who she is – he tells that John Eyre died and left her 20,000 pounds. He knows this because St. John is his uncle too – his full name is St. John Eyre Rivers – making them cousins. Jane shares her fortune amongst them. St. John proposes to Jane, but her 'heart is mute.' She rejects him. He tells her she is rejecting Christianity.	"St. John, no doubt, would have given the world to follow, recall, retain her, when she thus left him; but he would not give one chance of heaven, nor relinquish, for the elysium of her love, one hope of the true, eternal Paradise."
<b>Chapters 35-38</b>	St. John almost convinces Jane to marry him, but she then hears Rochester's voice calling to her for help (assumedly in her mind). She decides to return to him. She returns to Thornfield to find it in ruins. At a nearby inn, she is told that Bertha set the house on fire, in which she perished. In the blaze, Rochester lost his sight and his vision. She finds Rochester at Ferndean, desperately sad but still physically strong. She takes him water and he embraces her. At first, he suggests she leave him (as he is infirm) but when she refuses, proposes to her. She gleefully accepts. They marry and remain at Ferndean. Jane never tires of loving him. His sight returns in one eye in time for the birth of their first son. Diana & Mary both marry well and St. John writes from India about the prospect of death.	"I will be your neighbor, your nurse, your housekeeper. I find you lonely: I will be your companion—to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you."  "Reader, I married him."

**Brontë's Language Devices**

**Features of the Romantic Novel**

<b>Simile</b>	"she ran nimbly up the stair, swept me like a whirlwind into the nursery" (C4)	<b>Stage 1</b> – The young protagonist experiences loss. <i>Jane grows up as an orphan, looked after by the cold-hearted, resentful Mrs Reed.</i>
<b>Allusion</b>	"comparative silence quelled the Babel clamour of tongues" (C5)	<b>Stage 2</b> – The young protagonist leaves the family setting. <i>Jane is sent away to go to the Lowood School.</i>
<b>Onomatopoeia</b>	"the tinkle of the bell as much significance as their laugh." (C17)	<b>Stage 3</b> – The process of maturity is long, arduous and gradual, and restricted by social structure. <i>Jane encounters many ups and downs on the way to finding herself and her happiness.</i>
<b>Metaphor</b>	The Moon is a metaphor change. It is either described or looked upon at times when Jane's life is about to take a new direction.	<b>Stage 4</b> – The protagonist finds their place in society. <i>Jane marries Rochester, finding true equality and happiness.</i>