

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Jane Eyre (Unabridged) by Charlotte Brontë

## Book Information

Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre (Unabridged)  
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In this stormy, intense, introspective novel of the mid-nineteenth century, Jane Eyre is a plain, yet spirited, governess whose virtuous integrity, keen intellect, and perseverance break through class barriers to reach the man she loves.

**Topics:** Community Life, Social Iniquities; Emotions, Love; Popular Groupings, College Bound; Popular Groupings, Upper Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 9-12; Romance, Romance (All); Series, Modern Library Classics

## Main Characters

Adele Varens Jane's pupil at Thornfield  
Bertha Mr. Rochester's deranged wife  
Bessie Lee a servant of the Reeds who is sometimes friendly to Jane  
Celine Varens mother of Adele; a French dancer who had been Mr. Rochester's mistress  
Eliza, Georgiana, and John daughters and son of Mrs. Reed; Jane's cousins  
Grace Poole Bertha's caretaker  
Helen Burns a friend of Jane's at Lowood  
Jane Eyre the principal character of the story; a plain orphan girl who later becomes a governess  
John Eyre Jane's uncle who leaves her an inheritance when he dies  
Mary and Diana Rivers St. John's sisters, who become like sisters to Jane  
Miss Blanche Ingram thought to be Mr. Rochester's fiancée  
Miss Temple the kind superintendent of Lowood

Mr. Brocklehurst the manager and treasurer of Lowood

Mr. Edward Rochester the owner of Thornfield; Jane's employer, who later becomes her husband

Mr. Lloyd an apothecary who cares for Jane at the Reeds and suggests she go to school

Mrs. Alice Fairfax the housekeeper at Thornfield

Mrs. Reed Jane's aunt and guardian

Richard Mason Bertha's brother

St. John Eyre Rivers Jane's cousin, who asks her to become his wife and do missionary work with him

## Vocabulary

**bairn** a child

**pelisse** a long cloak or outer garment originally made of or lined with fur

**poltroon** a base coward

**seraglio** a harem

**surtout** an overcoat

## Synopsis

Jane Eyre is an orphan girl who lives with her aunt, Sarah Reed, and her cousins, John, Eliza, and Georgiana. She is unloved and unwanted in the Reed home. Her aunt punishes her wrongfully, and her cousins tease her. Jane finally reaches the limit of tolerance when she is ten years old, and the apothecary, Mr. Lloyd, suggests Jane be sent to school.

Mr. Brocklehurst, the administrator of Lowood School, interviews Jane and agrees with Mrs. Reed that Jane is sinful and needs the discipline of a Christian boarding school such as Lowood. After this meeting, Jane confronts her aunt and refuses to be intimidated by her any longer.

Jane arrives at Lowood School to discover that conditions there are abominable. The food is scant and poorly cooked, the rooms are cold, and the clothing is crude and unflattering. Jane makes a close friend, Helen Burns, who later dies in her arms.

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A typhus epidemic breaks out at the school, and many students die. One positive change occurs, however. Mr. Brocklehurst loses his power, and the school becomes more tolerable. Jane completes her studies in six years and serves as a teacher at Lowood for two years. When Miss Temple, the kind superintendent of the school, gets married and moves away from Lowood, Jane decides it is time for her to move on, too. She places an advertisement in the *Herald* to which she receives only one reply: a request for a governess from Mrs. Fairfax of Thornfield. Jane accepts the job.

Jane arrives at Thornfield to a warm welcome. She meets her pupil, Adele Varens, the foster child of the master, Mr. Rochester. Edward Fairfax Rochester often travels, and Mrs. Fairfax runs the house in his absence. Jane finally meets Mr. Rochester when she is walking home from town. She encounters and helps a horseman who has fallen on the ice and later discovers that the horseman was Mr. Rochester.

Jane is attracted to Mr. Rochester and enjoys stimulating conversations with him. Beneath a gruff exterior, she finds he has a kind heart. One night, Jane hears strange laughter and notices smoke coming from Mr. Rochester's room. Jane throws water on the fire and awakens Mr. Rochester. He begs Jane to keep the matter secret and blames the fire on a house servant, Grace Poole. Jane's growing love for him is becoming evident.

Meanwhile, Mr. Rochester is courting the beautiful Blanche Ingram, a shallow woman of excellent social standing. He gives a houseparty for her and seven other guests. Richard Mason joins them and is attacked and hurt during the night. Again Mr. Rochester blames Grace Poole and keeps the incident a secret from his servants and guests.

Jane leaves Thornfield for a short time to visit her dying aunt, Sarah Reed. She hopes to reconcile with her, but her aunt rejects her, as usual. Before she dies, she tells Jane that her Uncle John from the West Indies has been trying to find her. She admits

that she lied to him about Jane's death. Sarah Reed dies, and Jane returns to Thornfield.

When she returns, she discovers that Mr. Rochester is no longer courting Miss Ingram. He surprises Jane with a marriage proposal, and she accepts. Before the vows can be said, the wedding is halted by a solicitor with the news that Mr. Rochester is already married. His wife had recently been seen in Mr. Rochester's house by her brother, Mr. Mason.

Mr. Rochester leads Jane, the minister, and the two men to the third floor of Thornfield where he presents his wife to them. Bertha Mason Rochester is a madwoman who is locked away and guarded by Grace Poole. Mr. Rochester appeals to Jane and wants her to become his mistress. She refuses and flees from Thornfield with little money and few possessions.

Jane arrives in Whitcross and is forced to beg for charity. She is rescued by St. John Rivers, a dedicated but cold-natured minister, when she collapses on his doorstep. Jane soon becomes friends with his sisters, Diana and Mary. She accepts a job as the schoolmistress of a newly opened girls' school. Jane later inherits 20,000 pounds from her Uncle John Eyre and discovers that she, St. John, Diana, and Mary are cousins. She is so happy to have a family that she divides her inheritance with them.

Thinking she would make the perfect helper, St. John asks Jane to marry him and work with him as a missionary in India. Jane refuses to marry him because he does not truly love her. She still clings to her memories of Rochester.

Jane returns to Thornfield to find it in ruins. A fire destroyed Thornfield, killed Bertha Rochester, and maimed and blinded Rochester. She finds Rochester at his current home, Ferndean. She and Rochester are married and live at Ferndean. Ten years later, they are still happily married and Rochester has recovered vision in one eye and can see their newborn son.

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## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Initial Understanding

Why does Jane feel gratitude toward Mr. Reed, Miss Temple, Bessie Lee, Mrs. Fairfax, and Diana and Mary Rivers?

*Answers should reflect the idea that all these people showed Jane kindness and love.*

### Literary Analysis

This story took place during the Victorian Era. How might this story be different if it were set in the present time?

*Answers might include: Mr. Rochester would probably have just divorced his wife and married Jane. Bertha would be in a hospital for the mentally ill. The classes of society would probably not be so clear-cut. St. John probably would not have asked Jane to marry him since they were first cousins. The children of Lowood Institute would be fed and clothed properly and treated as valued members of society.*

### Inferential Comprehension

Describe how Jane changed by the end of the story.

*She had grown more confident in herself. She was financially independent. She had found a family and a place to belong.*

## Constructing Meaning

Find examples from the book that show how nature colored the mood or was used to describe the mood of the characters in the story.

*One example would be when Jane enjoys a harvest scene during good weather as she anticipates her upcoming marriage. Later, bleak, wintry weather terms were used to describe Jane and her prospects after her marriage to Mr. Rochester is halted. When Jane is at her lowest, right before finding help at Moor House, it rains and a cold wind chills her. Students may find other examples.*

## Teachable Skills

**Understanding Characterization** Have students write a description of Jane's moral character, values, and religious beliefs. As a class, compare her values and beliefs to those of Helen Burns or St. John. How are they alike? In what ways are they different?

**Understanding the Author's Craft** Charlotte Brontë used foreshadowing throughout the book to foretell events that were to come later in the story. As a class, find some examples of foreshadowing in the book and discuss how it helped to make the story more suspenseful.

**Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning** The story contains many references to articles of clothing which are called by different names or not even worn at the present time. There are also many phrases in French in the story. Have the students locate these unusual words and foreign phrases in the story and research their meanings.

**Responding to Literature** Students may enjoy rewriting parts of *Jane Eyre* as a play and performing for each other. Several movies based on the book have been made. Students may also enjoy watching the movie after they have read the book. They could make comparisons between the book and the movie.