Characters

Protagonist: Jane Eyre

Antagonist: Adversity

Jane Eyre: Strong-willed, plain-looking daughter of a poor clergyman. Both of her parents die while she is still an infant. A cruel aunt rears her to age ten as an unwanted and inferior member of the family, then sends her to a charity school, Lowood Orphan Asylum. Jane spends six years there as a student and two years as a teacher before accepting a position, at age eighteen, as the governess of the ward of Edward Rochester at his estate, Thornfield Hall. Jane is intelligent, well educated (thanks in part to her love of books), industrious, loyal, compassionate, and morally upright, with an independent spirit.

Edward Fairfax Rochester: Gruff, sometimes moody employer of Jane Eyre. He falls in love with Jane, who is about half his age, and gains her assent to marry him even though he already has a wife—an insane woman whom he keeps in the attic of Thornfield Hall.

Mrs. Sarah Reed: Cruel aunt who rears Jane Eyre. Her husband made her promise to do so before he died.

John Reed: Late husband of Sarah Reed and brother of Jane's mother. He is entombed in the chancel of Gateshead Church.

Young John Reed: Son of John and Sarah Reed. He constantly bedevils Jane, reminding her that she is a lowly orphan who does not deserve to live in the Reed home. He is a cruel and mischievous boy, Jane says, who "twisted the necks of the pigeons, killed the little pea-chicks, set the dogs at the sheep, stripped the hothouse vines of their fruit, and broke the buds off the choicest plants in the conservatory."

Eliza, Georgiana Reed: Daughters of John and Sarah Reed. Like their brother, they make like miserable for Jane, who says, "Eliza and Georgiana, evidently acting according to orders, spoke to me as little as possible."

Rowland Rochester: Edward Rochester's brother.

Old Mr. Rochester: Edward Rochester's father.

Mr. Miles: Headmaster at the school young John Reed attends. When Mrs. Reed keeps John out of school for several weeks because of his "delicate health," Mr. Miles says that John's problem is that he receives too many cakes and sweetmeats from home.

Bessie: Nurse in the employ of Mrs. Reed. She treats Jane humanely.
Abbot: Maid in the employ of Mrs. Reed. She sides with Mrs. Reed against Jane.
Robert Leaven: Coachman whom Bessie marries.
Bobby and Jane Leaven: Children of Robert Leaven and Bessie.
Mr. Lloyd: Apothecary who attends Jane at Gateshead Hall after she blacks out.
Mr. Carter: Surgeon who treats Rochester after the latter falls from a horse and suffers a sprain. He also treats the wounds Richard Mason suffered when his insane sister attacked him.
Mr. Brocklehurst: Minister and headmaster at Lowood Orphan Asylum who embezzles money from the school.
Mrs. Brocklehurst: Wife of Mr. Brocklehurst.
Misses Brocklehurst: Sixteen- and seventeen-year-old daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Brocklehurst.
Helen Burns, Mary Wilson: Good friends of Jane at Lowood.
Julia Severn: Student scolded by Brocklehurst for daring to wear her hair in curls. [She has naturally curly hair.]
Maria Temple: Kindly superintendant and teacher at Lowood Orphan Asylum. She becomes a good friend of Jane.
Miss Scatcherd: History and grammar teacher at Lowood. She treats the students cruelly. She is especially hard on Helen Burns, whom she whips.
Miss Smith: Lowood teacher who helps students make their clothes.
Madame Pierrot: Lowood's French teacher from Lisle, France.
Miss Miller: An under-teacher at Lowood who greets Jane after she arrives there from Gateshead Hall.
Miss Gryce: Welsh teacher who shares a room with Jane after the latter becomes a teacher at Lowood.
Mr. Bates: Surgeon who treats Helen Burns when she becomes ill.
Nurse: Woman who assists Bates and informs Jane that Helen Burns is about to die.
Mrs. Alice Fairfax: Kindly elderly woman who manages Thornfield Hall and keeps house there. Rochester's mother was a second cousin of Mrs. Fairfax's late husband.
Adèle Varens: French girl of about ten who has been at Thornfield Hall for six months before Jane arrives to become her governess. She is the ward of Rochester. Although the story focuses little attention on her character development, she is a pivotal presence in the novel in that her education and care are the reasons that Jane Eyre goes to Thornfield Hall.
Sophie: Adèle's French nurse.
Céline Varens: Adèle's mother and a French opera dancer. Rochester had an affair with her after his wife went insane.
Madame Frederic: Woman with whom Adèle Varens lives for a short time before being adopted by Rochester and taken to Thornfield Hall.
Mr. Wood: Clergyman who is to marry Jane and Rochester.
Bertha Antoinetta Mason: Rochester's Jamaican Creole wife, who is confined to the attic at Thornfield Hall after going insane.
Richard Mason: Brother of Bertha Mason. He reveals that Rochester is already married.
Jonas Mason: Jamaican merchant an father of Bertha and Richard Mason.
Grace Poole: Servant who watches over Bertha Mason.
Briggs: Richard Mason's lawyer.
John: Servant at Thornfield Hall and later at Ferndean Manor.
Mary: John's wife, who is Rochester's cook.
Leah: Housemaid at Thornfield Hall.
Blanche Ingram: Beautiful young woman who is a guest at Thornfield Hall. Jane mistakenly believes Rochester plans to marry her.
Mary Ingram: Sister of Blanche and a guest at Thornfield Hall.
Dowager Lady Ingram: Mother of Blanche and Mary. She is a guest at Thornfield Hall.
Mr. Eshton: Magistrate, friend of Rochester, and a guest at Thornfield Hall.
Mrs. Eshton: Wife of Mr. Eshton and a guest at Thornfield Hall.
Amy and Louisa Eshton: Daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Eshton and guests at Thornfield Hall.
Sir George Lynn: Millcote politician and a guest at Thornfield Hall.
Lady Lynn: Wife of Sir George and a guest at Thornfield Hall.
Henry and Frederick Lynn: Children of Sir George and guests at Thornfield Hall.
Colonel and Mrs. Dent: Guests at Thornfield Hall.
Sam: Footman who brings coal for the guests at Thornfield Hall and informs them of the presence of a fortunetelling gipsy (Rochester in disguise).
Giacinta: Italian woman with whom Rochester had an affair while traveling in Europe.
Clara: German woman with whom Rochester had an affair while traveling in Europe.
Farmer: Man who gives Jane bread on her journey through the moors.
Shopwoman: Woman who sells bread cakes in a village Jane comes upon during her journey through the moors. She answers questions Jane asks about employment.
Woman at a Village House: Woman who answers questions Jane asks about employment in a village. Jane comes upon during her journey through the moors.
Woman at a Parsonage: Woman who answers Jane's questions at a parsonage at which Jane seeks a clergyman to help her find employment.
Girl at Cottage: Girl who gives Jane porridge after the latter spends the night in woods.
Mother of Girl: Mother of the girl at the cottage.
St. John (pronounced SIN jin) Rivers: Minister who, with his sisters, takes Jane in after she wanders on the moors.
Diana and Mary Rivers: Sisters of St. John who become good friends of Jane.
Hannah: Servant in the Rivers household.
Alice Wood: Jane's assistant at the school founded by St. John Rivers.
John Eyre: Uncle of Jane, St. John Rivers, and his two sisters. He bequeaths twenty thousand pounds to Jane, which she shares with the Rivers family.
Rosamond Oliver: Young woman in love with St. John Rivers.
Mr. Oliver: Father of Rosamond and wealthy owner of a needle factory.
Mr. Granby: Well-connected man whom Rosamond Oliver marries.
Sir Frederic Granby: Father of Mr. Granby.
Host of Rochester Arms: Keeper of the inn at which Jane stays when she returns to Thornfield Hall and finds it in ruins after the fire. He informs her of what happened to Rochester.
Damer de Rochester: Ancestor entombed in the church where Jane and Rochester go to be married before Richard Mason reveals that Rochester is already married. Damer de Rochester was killed in the Battle of Marston Moor (July 2, 1644) during the English Civil War.
Elizabeth: Wife of Damer de Rochester.
Coachmen Animals: Pilot, Rochester's dog; Mesrour, Rochester's black horse; Carlo, Rosamond Oliver's dog.

Historical Background

• The novel takes place in England around the 1840s, during the Victorian era.
• This period takes its name from Queen Victoria, who reigned from 1837 to 1901.
• The period was generally a time of peace and prosperity, and by the 1840s, England had emerged as the leading industrial society of the world and the hub of a vast colonial empire.
• The rising middle class was amassing unprecedented wealth, but for the working population the 1840s came to be known as the "Hungry Forties," a time of poverty and economic upheaval.
• These class distinctions as well as the deprivations of the socially disadvantaged are evident in the plot, settings, and characters of Jane Eyre.
Societal Issues

a. Women’s place in Victorian society
b. Role of religion and the clergy
c. Position of governesses
d. Charity schools
e. Treatment of children
f. Class system

DID YOU KNOW? The occupation of governess had a special appeal for middle-class women during the Victorian era. At this time, a woman who was not financially supported by a husband or other male relative had few ways to earn a living. While many women in the 1800s did work in mills and factories, the unmarried daughters of merchants, doctors, lawyers, and clergymen sought more “suitable” employment that could offer a moderately respectable lifestyle. A governess lived with the upper-middle-class or upper-class family who hired her to teach their children. In addition to securing comfortable lodgings, she earned a modest salary.

Being a governess, however, had considerable drawbacks. Although a governess maintained a ladylike appearance and was often better educated than her employers, she was not treated as an equal. At the same time, her social status was above that of the servants, who often ridiculed the governess’s claims to gentility. Working long hours and being expected to remain invisible during social gatherings, governesses had little social contact with adults, male or female. They had difficulty receiving visits in their employers’ homes and kept in touch with friends mainly through correspondence. Thus the life of a governess was extremely lonely. As Brontë herself commented, “A private governess has no existence, is not considered as a living and rational being except as connected with the wearisome duties she has to fulfil.”

The financial situation of a governess was also precarious. The wages of first-time governesses were not much higher than those of a housekeeper or lady’s maid. While their wages rose over time, governesses, unlike servants, were expected to purchase their own clothes and pay for their own travel. Thus, they were often left with only pocket money and had little extra to save.
In addition, the working life of a governess was generally short. Families favored governesses in their mid- to late-twenties. This fact, coupled with the oversupply of women seeking posts, made it harder for governesses to find work after age thirty, and many faced retirement by the age of forty. To stave off an impoverished old age, a disproportionate number of governesses ended up living in mental asylums, the cheapest lodgings they could find, or old-age homes designed specifically for these working women.

Chapters 1-10 - Gateshead Hall and Lowood

BEFORE YOU READ

Growing up, most people at some time have the experience of being left out or feeling like an outsider. In your opinion, why is this experience so painful?

Think of some situations in which a person might feel ignored or rejected by a group of people. What kinds of feelings do people have in these situations? How can the experience of feeling like an outcast shape a person’s personality? Explain.

Read to find out about the experiences of a young girl who is both an orphan and an outsider.

Gothic Novels

Gothic novels take place in gloomy or eerie settings, such as old castles or dark mansions, and emphasize horror, mystery, and the supernatural. Gothic novels, read mainly for entertainment, were especially popular in England in the early 1800s. While Jane Eyre is not a gothic novel, it does contain gothic features. In these chapters, there is a reference to the supernatural, when Jane, in the red-room, thinks she sees a ghost.
Mood
- The novel opens with a modest statement about the weather: “There was no possibility of taking a walk that day.” It is winter; the weather is cold, dark, and rainy. Jane, taking refuge from the unfriendly Reed family, nestles on a window seat close to the glass, hidden by a heavy red curtain. There she reads a favorite book in search of comfort.
- In this emblematic description of the setting, Brontë quickly conveys one of the main themes of the novel—emotional isolation and the search for self-respect.
- The bleak winter weather not only reflects Jane’s inhospitable surroundings but also her lonely state of mind.
- Jane lives without the warmth of family or friends.
- In this scene, she turns from people to nature, from society to her own imagination.
- As you read the novel, notice how Brontë continues to use the weather to represent Jane’s inner self and, in addition, to establish mood and underscore the action of the story.

Point of View
- In Jane Eyre, the storyteller and the main character are the same person. In other words, the story is told from the first-person point of view.
- The first-person approach also serves as a way of getting the reader to empathize with the main character. As you read, think about whether you are sympathetic to Jane’s feelings.
- Notice that the perspective in the narrative is that of an older, mature Jane looking back on her life.
- Jane is ten years old at the opening of Chapter 1 and eighteen at the close of Chapter 10.
- Another interesting feature of the novel’s point of view is Brontë’s direct comments to the reader. These comments occur more frequently after the first ten chapters.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW
- antipathy n.: strong dislike
- ardently adv.: with passion or energy
- ascertain v.: to find out for sure
- audacious adj.: recklessly bold
- chastisement n.: punishment
- desist v.: to cease; to stop
- ravenous adj.: excessively hungry
- solace n.: relief from grief or anxiety
What challenges or trials does Jane face at Gateshead and at Lowood? What do we learn about Jane from her responses to these trials? Do you see any signs of personal growth or change in Jane in these settings?

Chapter 1: GATESHEAD HALL AND THE REED FAMILY

Identify People:
• Mrs. Reed
• Eliza Reed
• John Reed
• Georgiana Reed
• Bessie Abbot

How does the main character, Jane, relate to these people?

Consider Places:
• Inside-Drawing room
• Inside-Breakfast room/window seat
• Why does the scene in the drawing room exclude Jane?
• Why does she seek the window seat in the breakfast room?

Personal reaction:
React to the last paragraph of chapter 1: “Take her away…” What questions immediately come to mind?

Chapter 2
People:
Note new insights given into the characters of
• Bessie and Abbot
• Mrs. Reed
• John
• Eliza
• Georgiana

What new information is given about Mr. Reed?
Places:
• Describe the red-room. Give physical description and the atmosphere created.
• Why does Jane have such a fear of the room?

Personal Reaction:
Reread the paragraph: “I was in a discord in Gateshead Hall.” Do you feel that Jane’s analysis is true?

Chapter 3
Identify People
• Mr. Lloyd
• Jane’s family

• Is there a difference between Bessie’s treatment of Jane and Abbot’s treatment of Jane?

Identify Places:
• Nursery as opposed to red-room
• Gateshead as opposed to poverty
• Gateshead as opposed to school

Chapter 4: LOWOOD
People:
• What is the changed relationship between the Reeds and Jane?
• What is the changed relationship between Bessie and Jane?
• What is the importance of Jane’s statement—“Human beings must love something”?
• Describe Mr. Brocklehurst.
Places:
• How is Lowood described?

Personal Events:
• Why does Mrs. Reed twice express fear in this chapter?
• React to Jane’s words: “Something of vengeance I had tasted for the first time; as aromatic wine it seemed, on swallowing, warm and racy; its
after-flavor, metallic and corroding, gave me a sensation as if I had been poisoned.” Vengeance = revenge

RECALL FROM CHAPTERS 1-10
1. Identify in one sentence:
   a. Jane
   b. Helen Burns
   c. Mrs. Reed
   d. Bessie
   e. Mr. Brocklehurst
   f. Miss Temple
   g. John Reed

2. (a) How does Mrs. Reed treat Jane? (b) What happens in the red-room? (c) What does Jane say to her aunt after this upsetting incident?

3. What vague ideas of school does Jane have when Mr. Lloyd suggests it? What additional ideas are given by Mr. Brocklehurst’s description of Lowood? What is the actuality experienced by Jane at Lowood? Are Jane’s experiences of Lowood all bad?

4. What does Mr. Brocklehurst believe builds strong character?

5. (a) Describe the conditions at Lowood School. (b) What is unfair about Mr. Brocklehurst’s treatment of Jane? (c) What observation does Helen make about Jane?

6. “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”

7. “Turn the other cheek and do good to them that hate you.” How are Jane and Helen Burns different in their attitude toward injustice? How do these two philosophies of life match the characters of Jane Eyre and Helen Burns?

8. Before Jane leaves Lowood, Bessie comes to visit. What are the observations of Bessie regarding Jane’s growth and development? At 18, is Jane pleased with Bessie’s observations? Why does beauty seem so important to Jane?

9. What real people or places or incidents in Charlotte Bronte’s life may have contributed to her depiction of certain persons, places, or incidents in the novel?

10. (a) Why do conditions at Lowood improve? (b) What does Jane gain from her eight years there? (c) What is her ambition?
Before You Read

In romantic relationships, do you believe that opposites attract? Why or why not? What attributes besides physical characteristics might cause two people to be attracted to each other?

When you read, pay attention to clues that indicate romantic attraction.

Background

• In this portion of the novel, Jane embarks on a new phase of her life at a place called Thornfield Hall, where she will serve as a governess.
• At Thornfield, the novel takes on a more gothic feeling. **Gothic novels** take place in gloomy or eerie settings, such as old castles or dark mansions, and emphasize horror, mystery, and the supernatural. Gothic novels, read mainly for entertainment, were especially popular in England in the early 1800s. While *Jane Eyre* is not a gothic novel, it does contain gothic features. Even in earlier chapters, there is a reference to the supernatural, when Jane, in the red-room, thinks she sees a ghost.

**VOCABULARY PREVIEW**

• abruptly adv. suddenly; without courtesy
• hector v. to harass; to bully
• imperious adj. commanding; dominant
1. Describe Thornfield Hall. What are Jane’s first impressions? How do they later change?

(a) At Thornfield, who is Jane’s new pupil?
(b) What strange sound does Jane hear on her tour of Thornfield Hall?
(c) Who does she think is responsible?

2. Consider Jane’s feelings toward Rochester:
   a. at her first meeting on the road
   b. at the interview when he examines her paintings
   b. at his later disclosures of his “sinful” past
   c. on the night of the fire
   d. from his behavior at the house party

3. Reread the descriptions of Jane’s paintings (chapter 13). What do they tell the reader about Jane?

4. In what ways has Jane changed or grown since her arrival at Thornfield?

5. In chapter 19, Rochester questions Jane’s loyalty. What are her responses? How might this scene be an example of foreshadowing for the next section of the novel?
6. How does Jane find herself in the position of saving Rochester’s life?
7. What sort of suspicion is aroused by the event that threatens Rochester’s life?
8. Who is Mason? (b) How does Rochester react when he learns of his arrival?
9. What strange incident involving Mason brings Jane to Rochester’s aid again? (b) What do all these events imply about the relationship between Rochester and Mason?
10. How does Brontë create a sense of suspense, tension, and uncertainty in Chapters 11-20?

Did you find Rochester to be a believable character? Why or why not? Were you surprised by Jane’s attraction to Rochester? Explain.

Chapters 21-27

Figuring Out Rochester

Rochester bears some similarities to a type of character known as the Byronic hero. This male character type is based on the poetry and life of Lord Byron, a dashing Romantic poet whose works influenced many nineteenth-century English writers. Ruggedly handsome, adventurous, and moody, the Byronic hero usually has a guilty or shady past and a magnetic personality. As you read, consider how Rochester exemplifies or contradicts the Byronic hero.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW
- atone v. to make amends
- balm n. soothing substance
- dubious adj. doubtful; questionable
- feign v. to pretend
- impediment n. obstacle
- inquisitive adj. extremely curious
- presentiments n. premonitions
- rake n. person of loose morals
- vehemence n. intense emotion or force
- verge n. brink; edge
"Do you think I am a machine without feelings? Do you think because I am poor, obscure, plain and little, I am heartless and soulless? You think wrong! I have as much heart and as much soul as you! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and wealth, I should have made it as heard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you."

Jane! Jane, listen to me! You are going nowhere!
RECALL AND INTERPRET

1. Jane believes she will need to look for a new job because __________.
2. Jane begins to hope that Rochester and Blanche will not be married because ___
3. Jane sobs when Rochester speaks of her going away to Ireland because ___
4. Rochester asks Jane to marry him because ___.
5. Although guarded at first, Jane agrees to marry Rochester because ___.
6. Rochester says, “God pardon me!” and “Man, meddle not with me” after Jane agrees to marry him because ___
7. Jane does not want Rochester to buy her dresses and jewels because ___.
8. Rochester acted as though he were courting Blanche because ___
9. Jane is troubled on the night before the wedding because ___
10. (a) When Jane revisits Gateshead, what letter does Mrs. Reed show her? (b) What are Jane’s feelings now toward Mrs. Reed?
11. (a) What disastrous event happens on Jane’s wedding day? (b) Who is Bertha? (c) How does Jane feel when she learns of Bertha’s existence?
12. Explain Rochester’s rationale in saying he has a right to marry Jane. Do you agree or disagree?
13. Explain Jane’s rationale in deciding to leave Rochester. Do you agree or disagree?
14. List three examples of foreshadowing in this section.

Some critics see Bertha as a symbol of uncontrolled passion, or the darker side of Jane’s emotional nature and her need for self-expression. They point out that Bertha’s appearance in the story comes just at the moment that Jane has decided to give herself up to her passionate and dreamlike romance with Rochester.

The novel *The Wide Saragossa Sea* is told from Bertha’s perspective.

Chapters 28-35 -- Moor House and The Rivers Family

Read about the next phase of Jane’s life and her relationship with another strong personality.

Chapter 28 introduces St. John Rivers, another character who will become significant in Jane’s life. As you read, pay attention to St. John’s appearance, manner or mood, past life, and goals. Consider what St. John does and says about himself as well as what other characters observe about him.
Jane and St. John, her clergyman cousin, have a number of intense conversations that reveal much about their personalities as well as their feelings for each other. What traits in St. John attract Jane and what traits repel her?

People who are committed to improving the world around them must often make personal sacrifices. What do you think are some of the costs and benefits of making such a commitment?

VOCABULARY PREVIEW
• approbation n. approval
• austere adj. harsh; severe
• averse adj. opposed
• despots n. rulers with absolute power
• discourse n. thoughtful conversation
• famished adj. starved
• fetters n. chains; restraints
• inexorable adj. relentless; inflexible
• stoicism n. indifference to pain
RECALL AND INTERPRET

1. What happens to Jane on the way to Marsh End?
2. Describe Jane’s life at Moor House. How does Jane respond to the Rivers family? How does she get along with Diana and Mary? Why is this section important to her growth?
3. How does St. John help Jane?
4. What does his response to Rosamond Oliver reveal about him?
5. (a) What news does St. John bring to Jane? (b) What does Jane’s reaction to the news reveal about her?
6. (a) Why does St. John ask Jane to come to India with him as his wife? (b) How does she answer him?
7. What does Jane mean when she says, “If I join St. John, I abandon half myself?”
8. Jane comes close to changing her mind about marrying St. John. Why?
9. (a) What does Jane’s response to Rochester’s voice suggest about her values and feelings? (b) What conflicts seem to be troubling her?
10. How does St. John Rivers act as a foil (a contrast) for Rochester?
11. How may the proposal of St. John Rivers be paralleled to the proposal of Rochester?
12. Jane returns to Rochester before she finds out about Thornfield and Bertha. Is she now willing to accept the position of Rochester’s mistress?
13. Why can Jane find happiness with Rochester now? Note the importance of each of the following to Jane:
   a. Rochester’s freedom from a wife
   b. Rochester’s injuries
   c. Jane’s inheritance
   d. Jane’s discovery of a family at Moor House
   e. Jane’s knowledge of her own self
Chapters 36-38 - Rochester: Thornfield Hall and Ferndean

VOCABULARY PREVIEW
• countenance n. face; expression
• desolate adj. alone and apart
• lachrymose adj. tearful
• relapse v. to fall back to an earlier state
• vainly adv. without success

RECALL AND INTERPRET

1. In Chapter 37, the plot brings Jane and Rochester back together. In the first chart below, record Jane’s comments and thoughts about herself and about Rochester. In the second, record important statements Rochester makes to Jane.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jane’s Comments/Thoughts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. “I am an independent woman now.”</td>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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<th>Rochester’s Statements to Jane</th>
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2. (a) What shock does Jane receive when she returns to Thornfield? (b) What does she learn about its inhabitants?
3. (a) How does Rochester say he felt in Jane’s absence? (b) What spiritual change has occurred in Rochester?
4. Do Jane and Rochester still feel the same way about each other? Explain.
5. In what way have the roles in Jane and Rochester’s relationship been reversed?
Merger or Takeover?
The meaning of the ending of the novel has been much debated. Some readers see Thornfield—Rochester’s world, and Marsh End—St. John’s world—as representing different sides of Jane Eyre. Disagreement exists about whether these two aspects are reconciled at the novel’s end. Some argue that Jane’s marriage to Rochester at Ferndean represents a blending of these two worlds.

Others point out that Rochester is now maimed and blind, everything he represents has been destroyed, and the author’s final words in the novel are devoted to St. John. Thus, one world outlasts the other. What’s your opinion?

Analyze the ending of the novel, supporting one of the views presented above. Make sure that your argument is persuasive and that it contains at least three points of evidence to support your position.

DID YOU KNOW? Several critics have pointed out that Jane Eyre marks the beginning of a new tradition in English literature, focusing on women’s emotional and moral development. Among the many literary offspring of Jane Eyre are two modern works of fiction that contain characters and situations quite similar to those in Brontë’s novel. Wide Sargasso Sea (1966) by Jean Rhys retells Brontë’s story from Bertha’s point of view. Rhys presents Bertha as a young woman married against her will. In The Four-Gated City (1965) by Doris Lessing, the heroine falls in love with her employer, whose mad wife lives in a cellar. Eventually, the heroine goes to live with the mad wife and experiences madness with her.

Charlotte Brontë: Feminist?
In an early scene in the novel, Jane, just after arriving at Thornfield, reflects on her prospects in life as a woman: Women are supposed to be very calm generally; but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; . . . and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making pudding and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.

In Brontë’s day, some women were speaking out for education, voting rights, and better employment opportunities for women. While Brontë was not among these so-called “Strong-Minded Women,” this statement by
her main character indicates that Brontë was concerned about the status of women in her society. As you finish reading the novel, think about the outcome of the story. Has Jane fulfilled her vision of the future, as described in Chapter 12? Would you describe Charlotte Brontë as a realist or an idealist about women’s roles in society?

Sources:
Cummings, Michael J. Jane Eyre Cummings Study Guide. 2007.