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Study Guide

for

Jane Eyre

by Charlotte Brontë



New York, New York Columbus, Ohio Woodland Hills, California Peoria, Illinois

Meet Charlotte Brontë



Unless I have something of my own to say, and a way of my own to say it in, I have no business to publish. . . . Unless I can have the courage to use the language of Truth in preference to the jargon of Conventionality, I ought to be silent.

—Charlotte Brontë

Charlotte Brontë, born in 1816, grew up in the small mill town of Haworth on the edge of the rugged moors of West Yorkshire, in northeastern England. The setting was isolated and made lonelier by the fact that Charlotte's mother had died when Charlotte was five. Charlotte, her four sisters—Maria, Elizabeth, Emily, and Anne—and their brother, Branwell, turned to each other for companionship.

Charlotte Brontë's father was a Cambridge-educated clergyman. Because the family was not well off, the Brontë girls were sent to a boarding school where they could prepare for their future employment as governesses. At the school, discipline was harsh, the food inadequate, and living conditions unhealthy. Students often became ill. Maria and Elizabeth Brontë both contracted consumption (today called tuberculosis) at the school and died at home in 1825. After this tragedy, Mr. Brontë himself educated the children at Haworth.

Throughout their childhood and into adulthood, the close-knit Brontë children entertained themselves by creating fanciful stories. Inspired by

a set of twelve wooden soldiers their father brought home, they invented imaginary worlds that were a blend of myth, history, current events, and society-page stories from newspapers and magazines. Gradually Charlotte came to focus on romantic passion and themes of temptation and betrayal in these melodramatic tales. This story-writing provided an essential outlet for Charlotte's creativity, an outlet she would painfully miss once she began her "wretched bondage" as a governess.

After unsuccessful attempts at living away from Haworth as students or teachers, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne decided to launch a school for girls in their hometown. To help them prepare for this venture, their aunt paid for them to go to a school in Belgium to study foreign languages. There, Charlotte fell deeply in love with her French teacher, a man with whom she had no hope of a future. Heartsick, she returned home.

When the sisters' school failed to attract pupils, all three turned in earnest to their long-cherished literary ambitions. Under male pseudonyms they published a joint collection of poems. Soon afterward, each sister completed a first novel. Emily's *Wuthering Heights* was published, as was Anne's novel. But Charlotte's *Professor*, a story loosely based on her experiences in Belgium, was rejected. Charlotte's second novel was an immediate success. *Jane Eyre*, the compelling story of a self-reliant young governess, was published in 1847. Alternately referred to by critics as "a book after our own heart" and an "anti-Christian composition," *Jane Eyre* signified the triumph of Charlotte's desire to bring forth a creation entirely her own.

Brontë's enjoyment of her fame was short-lived. Her brother Branwell, an unsuccessful artist who had become an alcoholic, died in 1848. Then, within a year, both of her sisters died of consumption. Charlotte continued to live at Haworth in order to care for her elderly father. She also continued to write. Finally, a year before her death, she married a family friend. She confided to Ellen Nussey, "What I taste of happiness is of the soberest order."

Introducing the Novel

The writer has us by the hand, forces us along her road, makes us see what she sees, never leaves us for a moment or allows us to forget her. At the end we are steeped through and through with the genius, the vehemence, the indignation of Charlotte Brontë.

—Virginia Woolf, British novelist

How did Charlotte Brontë come to write *Jane Eyre*? According to her friend and biographer Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte was having a debate with her sisters about the important qualities of a female protagonist. Acknowledging the tendency of authors to make their heroines beautiful, Charlotte asserted she would create “a heroine as plain and small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours.”

The main character of *Jane Eyre* is not pretty. As the character herself says:

I sometimes regretted that I was not handsomer: I sometimes wished to have rosy cheeks, a straight nose, and small cherry mouth; I desired to be tall, stately and finely developed in figure; I felt it a misfortune that I was so little, so pale, and had features so irregular and so marked.

Brontë’s unconventional heroine appealed to her readers, however. As one critic said in 1887, “Jane Eyre neither languishes in drawing-rooms nor sits dangling her ankles upon gates, but is always interesting, eloquent, vehement.”

Jane Eyre is a young governess, a middle-class woman hired to teach the children of well-to-do families. When we first meet Jane, she is ten years old, without money, family, or friends. The novel charts her progress toward maturity as she contends with a social world that is hostile and indifferent to her goals and desires.

Brontë’s novel is unconventional in ways other than her choice of heroine. Brontë tells Jane’s story in the form of an autobiographical narrative. In so doing, she takes readers into Jane’s inner life, a world of intense feeling and vigorous thought. At the time that the novel was published, such exploration of character and motive was new in English literature. While the popular gothic novels of the time—stories of the

supernatural set in exotic places—had explored the emotional side of experience, Brontë revealed the psychological undercurrents of everyday life. So lifelike was her depiction of Jane Eyre’s personality that many readers believed Jane was a real person. As Brontë’s contemporary G. H. Lewes remarked, “Reality—deep significant reality, is the characteristic of this book.”

Charlotte Brontë was strongly influenced by the Romantic poets of the early 1800s, including William Wordsworth and Lord Byron. Their works stressed the importance of imagination, subjective emotion, and individual freedom. Brontë embraced these ideas, but she also believed that literature should represent life. She showed concern about the social and economic problems of her day, about the poverty of the working classes and the secondary status of women. Later in life, she even wrote a novel, *Shirley*, about an industrial conflict that took place in Yorkshire. *Jane Eyre* expresses Brontë’s social conscience as well as her interest in the imaginative experience of the individual.

Many early readers of *Jane Eyre* also read Elizabeth Gaskell’s biography of Brontë, which came out just two years after Brontë’s death. Details in the biography fueled speculation about just how closely the novel mirrors Brontë’s own life. While there is not an exact correspondence, the novel does incorporate incidents and characters from Brontë’s life. Today the parallels between Charlotte and Jane are still part of the appeal of *Jane Eyre*, which remains one of the most popular of all English novels.

THE TIME AND PLACE

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*.

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.

Before You Read

Jane Eyre Chapters 1–10

FOCUS ACTIVITY

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?

Discuss

With a partner, 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.

Setting a Purpose

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

BACKGROUND

Talk About the Weather

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.

Did You Know?

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**. Using the first person allows the writer to explore her heroine's inner emotional life. 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. Also, 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 [an tip'ə thē] *n.* strong dislike

ardently [ärd'ənt lē] *adv.* with passion or energy

ascertain [as'ər tān'] *v.* to find out for sure

audacious [ô dā'shəs] *adj.* recklessly bold

chastisement [chas tiz'mənt] *n.* punishment

desist [di zist'] *v.* to cease; to stop

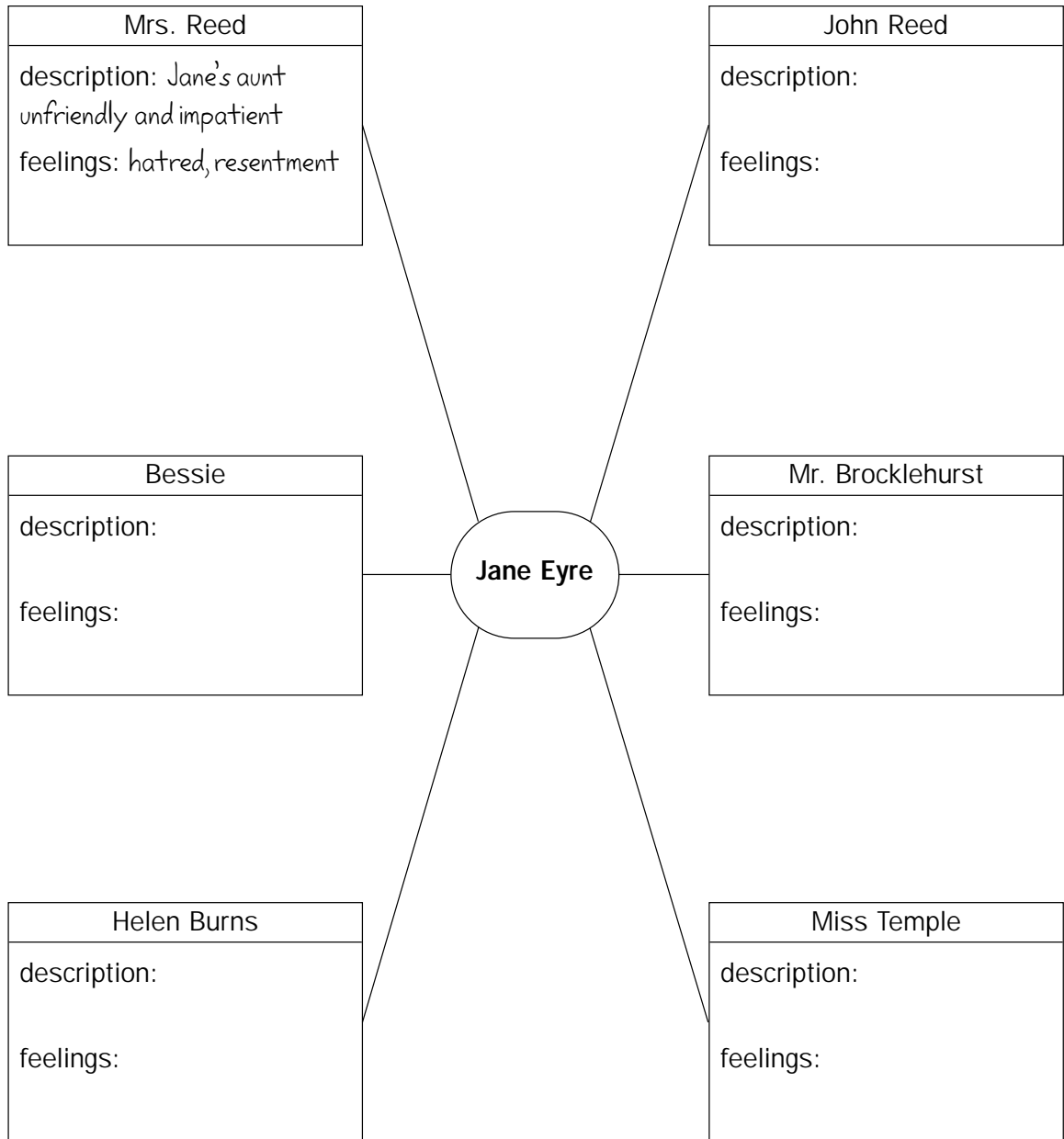
ravenous [rav'ə nəs] *adj.* excessively hungry

solace [sol'is] *n.* relief from grief or anxiety

Active Reading

Jane Eyre Chapters 1–10

In Chapters 1–10, readers learn a great deal about Jane through her interactions with other characters. As you read, identify each character and describe him or her in a phrase. Then note the feelings Jane has toward each person.



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Responding

Jane Eyre Chapters 1–10

Personal Response

What is your first impression of Jane Eyre? What qualities would make her valuable as a friend? What qualities would make friendship with her difficult? Explain.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. How does Mrs. Reed treat Jane? What happens in the red-room? What does Jane say to her aunt after this traumatic incident?

2. Describe the conditions at Lowood school. What is unfair about Mr. Brocklehurst's treatment of Jane? What observation does Helen make about Jane?

3. Why do conditions at Lowood improve? What does Jane gain from her eight years there? What is her ambition?

Responding

Jane Eyre Chapters 1–10

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. How are Jane and Helen Burns different in their attitude toward injustice? How would you explain this difference?

5. Mr. Brocklehurst, the head of Lowood school, believes that hardship builds strong character. What is your opinion of this point of view?

Literature and Writing

Character Analysis

In this portion of the novel, Brontë lets the reader into Jane’s mind as Jane analyzes her relations with others and describes her own personality. The author also describes Jane from the outside, through the words of other characters, such as Helen Burns, Mrs. Reed, and Mr. Brocklehurst.

Review the first ten chapters, paying special attention to Chapters 2, 4, 7, and 8, to answer these questions: 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? What generalizations might you make about Jane from age ten to age eighteen? Write your character analysis on a separate sheet of paper.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Discuss the events at Lowood Institution. In your group, review Chapters 5–7 for situations and details that convey the oppressive atmosphere at the school. Using this information, prepare a brief skit including actual or paraphrased dialogue from the novel. Assemble simple items to serve as props or parts of costumes that will help suggest the grim setting and atmosphere. Take turns presenting your scenes to the class.

Social Studies Connection

In Charlotte Brontë’s day, many orphans were sent to institutions like Lowood. Conduct research to find out what options exist today for children without parents. Consult library and Internet resources as well as the children’s services department in your county. Then, prepare two or three case studies, or profiles, using made-up names, that present typical situations.

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Before You Read

Jane Eyre Chapters 11–20

FOCUS ACTIVITY

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?

Chart It

Create a chart of personality traits that could be attraction factors. List at least six factors. Then rate each factor on a scale of 1 (least important) to 10 (most important).

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out what new relationships Jane experiences.

BACKGROUND

Gothic Novels

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. As you read Chapters 11–20, look for gothic features.

Did You Know?

Many of the settings and characters in *Jane Eyre* are drawn from Brontë's own life. The Clergy Daughters' School that Charlotte attended at the age of eight was the real-life model for the fictional Lowood Institution. Like Mr. Brocklehurst, its director, Carus Wilson, was a stern, aristocratic clergyman who believed that children were inherently wicked and should be kept in a state of humility. Another character at Lowood, the patient and wise Helen Burns, is believed to be a tribute to Brontë's older sister Maria. The setting of Thornfield also has a counterpart in Charlotte Brontë's life. Some of its features are based on the stately family home of Charlotte's close friend Ellen Nussey, whom she met in her teens at Roe Head school.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

abruptly [a brupt'lē] *adv.* suddenly; without courtesy

hector [hek'tər] *v.* to harass; to bully

imperious [im pēr'ē əs] *adj.* commanding; dominant

neophyte [nē'ə fīt'] *n.* beginner; inexperienced person

nonchalantly [non shə länt'lē] *adv.* coolly; without concern

piquant [pē'kənt] *adj.* stimulating; spicy

prattle [prat'əl] *v.* to babble

quell [kwel] *v.* to put to rest; to suppress

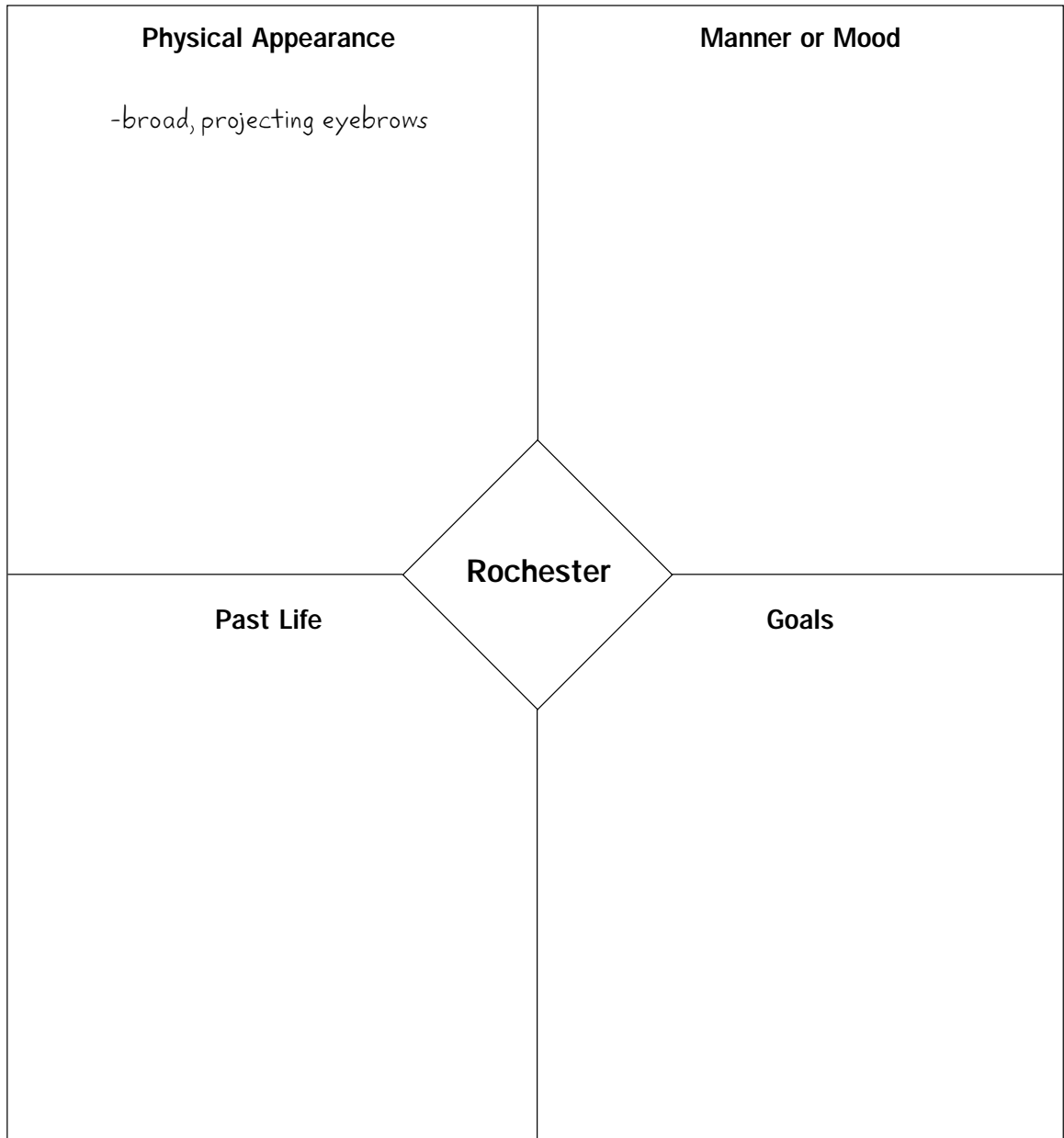
remorse [ri mōrs'] *adj.* deep regret; sense of guilt

tenacious [ti nā'shəs] *adj.* persistent

Active Reading

Jane Eyre Chapters 11–20

In these chapters, Jane gets to know her new employer, Edward Rochester of Thornfield Hall. As you read Chapters 13–15, make notes in the chart below about Rochester’s appearance, manner or mood, past life, and goals.



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Responding

Jane Eyre Chapters 11–20

Personal Response

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

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. At Thornfield, who is Jane's new pupil? What strange sound does Jane hear on her tour of Thornfield Hall? Who does she think is responsible?

2. How do Jane and Rochester behave toward each other when they converse? How does Jane find herself in the position of saving Rochester's life? What sort of suspicion is aroused by the event that threatens Rochester's life?

3. Who is Mason? How does Rochester react when he learns of his arrival? What strange incident involving Mason brings Jane to Rochester's aid again? What do all these events tell you about the relationship between Rochester and Mason?

Responding

Jane Eyre Chapters 11–20

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. How does Brontë create a sense of suspense, tension, and uncertainty in Chapters 11–20?

5. Do you think Rochester is in love with Blanche Ingram? Do you think he has any feelings for Jane? Before explaining your answers, review the chart you made for the **Focus Activity**.

Literature and Writing

Diary Entry

Arriving at Thornfield, Jane feels that a new “fairer” era of life is beginning for her. If Jane had kept a diary of her experiences as a new governess at Thornfield Hall, what might she have written? Put yourself in Jane’s place and write entries for at least three or four different days. For example, in your entries you might reflect on your tour of Thornfield Hall, your first meeting with your new pupil, the big house party, a conversation with Mr. Rochester, his intended marriage to Blanche Ingram, or one of the strange events that has occurred at Thornfield.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

In Chapters 11–20, we get to know *Jane Eyre* as a young woman. In your group, take a few minutes to allow each person to think of an adjective or phrase that describes Jane and then find supporting evidence in the book. This evidence could be dialogue or description from the novel, or a statement about how the character acts in a certain situation. Write down your evidence on a sheet of paper. Then, as a group, create a character web as you take turns sharing your descriptions and supporting points. Allow time for reactions to each description of Jane. After everyone has contributed, evaluate your web. Does it give a complete picture of Jane so far?

Art Connection

Jane, in addition to being qualified as a teacher, is an artist who favors dreamlike scenes and psychological content in her drawings. Review the description of her drawings in chapter 13 and then re-create one or more of them based on Brontë’s descriptions. Post the drawings in a place where all students can view and discuss them.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

Jane Eyre Chapters 21–27

FOCUS ACTIVITY

When you are faced with a tough decision, how do you make up your mind? How do you figure out what is the best thing to do?

Journal

Describe a time when you faced a difficult “either/or” decision. What were the pros and cons of each side? Did you make a good decision? Was your decision guided by emotions, principles, the opinions of others, or some other factor?

Setting a Purpose

Read the next section of the novel to find out about a decision Jane makes.

BACKGROUND

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.

Did You Know?

At the heart of every plot is a **conflict**—a struggle between two opposing forces. A plot is a series of events, carefully arranged by the writer to dramatize a central conflict faced by the main character. Brontë is concerned with portraying Jane’s struggles as soon as the novel begins. As a child, Jane faces conflicts with Mrs. Reed and later with Mr. Brocklehurst at Lowood school. These are both external conflicts. In many well-crafted works of fiction, external conflicts often reflect an internal or psychological conflict within the main character. Based on the novel so far, what external and internal conflicts can you identify in Jane? As you read Chapters 21–27, look for the **climax**, or point of highest tension, when the external and internal conflicts of the main character are sharply focused.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

atone [ə tōn’] *v.* to make amends

balm [bām] *n.* soothing substance

dubious [dūō’ bē əs] *adj.* doubtful; questionable

feign [fān] *v.* to pretend

impediment [im ped’ ə mənt] *n.* obstacle

inquisitive [in kwiz’ ə tiv] *adj.* extremely curious

presentiments [pri zen’ tə mənts] *n.* premonitions

rake [rāk] *n.* person of loose morals

vehemence [vē’ ə məns] *n.* intense emotion or force

verge [vurj] *n.* brink; edge

Active Reading

Jane Eyre Chapters 21–27

In these chapters, Jane and Rochester’s relationship takes a new turn. As you read Chapters 21–25, use the chart below to analyze why the two main characters think, feel, or act as they do. Provide specific responses based on the novel.

Jane and Rochester

1. Jane believes she will need to look for a new job	because →	Adèle will be sent to school after Rochester marries Blanche Ingram.
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 decides to act “flinty” toward Rochester	because →	
10. Jane is troubled on the night before the wedding	because →	

Responding

Jane Eyre Chapters 21–27

Personal Response

How do you feel about Jane's decision to leave Rochester? Are her actions believable in light of her character? Before responding to this question, review the journal entry you wrote for the **Focus Activity**.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. When Jane revisits Gateshead, what letter does Mrs. Reed show her? What are Jane's feelings now toward Mrs. Reed? Why?

2. What surprising revelation does Rochester make to Jane? What can you infer about Jane's feelings and beliefs from her statement "I could not, in those days, see God for his creature: of whom I had made an idol."

3. What disastrous event happens on Jane's wedding day? Who is Bertha? How does Jane feel when she learns of Bertha's existence? What does Jane decide to do? Why?

Responding

Jane Eyre Chapters 21–27

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Many fiction writers use dreams to **foreshadow**, or give hints of, later events. Give three examples of this technique from Chapters 21–27.

5. In Victorian England, a man could not divorce his wife if she was insane. Given this fact, was Rochester justified in asking Jane to marry him? Why or why not?

Literature and Writing

Rochester's Autobiography

In Chapter 27, Rochester reveals the full truth about his past. Write a narrative of Rochester's life from the time he left home as a young man to his meeting with Jane Eyre. Present events in chronological order and write the narrative in the first person, referring to Rochester as "I." As you describe events, include Rochester's motives for acting or feeling as he did. When you have finished the narrative, read it to another student. Ask for feedback on whether it is clear and complete.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

What do you make of Bertha Rochester? Is she just an obstacle to Rochester's happiness? Or does her character have a more representational role in the story? 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 sight of Bertha shocks Jane back to reality. Do you find this theory plausible? Or do you have another idea about Bertha? Hold a discussion to explore the function of Bertha Rochester's character in the novel.

Learning for Life

In the working world, being able to ask the right questions is often just as important as knowing the answers. Think of six to ten interview questions you would like to ask one of the characters in the novel to help you better understand his or her motives or intentions. Then, review your list. Select the three questions that you feel would uncover the most important insights into your character. With a partner playing the part of the character you've chosen, conduct your interview for the class. In a follow-up discussion, have your classmates evaluate your questions and your partner's answers.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

Jane Eyre Chapters 28–35

FOCUS ACTIVITY

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?

Web It

In a small group, think of some individuals who have dedicated their lives to helping others or to making the world a better place. Then create a web detailing the satisfactions and sacrifices that might go with dedicating one's life to an ideal.

Setting a Purpose

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

BACKGROUND

The Road of Life

Have you ever thought of life as a journey, with twists and turns as well as ups and downs? For Jane, the road of life has been especially bumpy. Her early life was one of almost unrelieved hardship and injustice. At Thornfield, she meets "flowers and pleasures" as well as "thorns and toils."

Life as a journey is a **metaphor**, or comparison, that many fiction writers use. One of the earliest and most famous examples is John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). In this highly symbolic morality tale, the main character, Christian, journeys from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, where he finds salvation. He carries a heavy bundle on his back, signifying his sins, and along the way struggles with giants who represent his doubts. As you read the next part of *Jane Eyre*, think about the life-as-journey metaphor. With whom or what does Jane struggle in this section?

Did You Know?

The scene shifts again in these next chapters as Jane finds herself in a remote moorland region, surrounded by bare, heather-clad hills. This landscape is much like that found in northern Yorkshire, where Charlotte Brontë grew up. The Brontë family has made this region of England so famous that the tourism bureau has dubbed it "Brontë Country." Contemporary author James Herriott has focused his writing on the same general setting. Herriott, a veterinarian, traveled to villages, farms, and homes across the Yorkshire countryside to tend to countless cats, dogs, and farm animals over a period of forty years. He has written about his experiences in several collections of stories, including *All Things Bright and Beautiful* and *All Creatures Great and Small*.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

approbation [ap'ro bā'shən] *n.* approval

austere [ô's tēr'] *adj.* harsh; severe

averse [ə vurs'] *adj.* opposed

despots [des'pəts] *n.* rulers with absolute power

discourse [dis'kôrs] *n.* thoughtful conversation

famished [fam'isht] *adj.* starved

fetters [fet'ərs] *n.* chains; restraints

inexorable [i nek'sər ə bəl] *adj.* relentless; inflexible

stoicism [stō'ə siz'əm] *n.* indifference to pain

Active Reading

Jane Eyre Chapters 28–35

Chapter 28 introduces St. John Rivers, another character who will become significant in Jane's life. As you read, make notes in the chart below about 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.

<p>Physical Appearance</p> <p>-tall and slender</p>	<p>Manner or Mood</p>
<p>St. John</p>	
<p>Past Life</p>	<p>Goals</p>

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Responding

Jane Eyre Chapters 28–35

Personal Response

Did any events in Chapters 28–35 seem unrealistic, or improbable, to you? Explain.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What happens to Jane on the way to Marsh End? How does Jane respond to the Rivers family?

2. How does St. John help Jane? What news does he bring to Jane? What does Jane's reaction to the news reveal about her?

3. Why does St. John ask Jane to come to India with him as his wife? How does she answer him? What do you think Jane means when she says, "If I join St. John, I abandon half myself?"

Responding

Jane Eyre Chapters 28–35

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Jane comes close to changing her mind about marrying St. John. Why? What does her response to Rochester's voice suggest about her values and feelings? What conflicts seem to be troubling her?
-
-

5. What kinds of images does Brontë use to describe St. John? Give two examples. Why are these images appropriate?
-
-

Literature and Writing

Another Sort of Man

Jane has mixed feelings about St. John. Do you share those feelings? What seems to make him tick as a person? Write a psychological profile of this character. Before you write, review the character chart from the **Active Reading** with these questions in mind:

- How does St. John generally behave toward his sisters? What does his response to Rosamond Oliver reveal about him? What is his attitude toward Jane Eyre?
- How does St. John describe himself? How do others describe him? In what way does St. John provide a foil, or contrast, to Rochester? What traits in St. John attract Jane and what traits repel her?

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

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. In your group, identify these conversations and read them aloud. Have different pairs of students read the parts of Jane and St. John in each dialogue. Try to take on the characters' attitudes as they speak. Plan the expression and tone of voice you will use. Then read the dialogue aloud once with your partner before presenting it to the group.

Listening and Speaking

When St. John proposes a new path in life for Jane, she raises a number of objections, but St. John has an answer ready for each protest she makes. Being able to anticipate and address objections can help you in situations where you are trying to persuade someone to see your point of view. Choose one of the following situations to role-play with a partner, or create your own. Raise and persuasively answer at least three objections in your skit.

- You are eager to be hired for a particular job. You are generally well qualified, but there are certain weaknesses in your background.
- You are asking a parent or another adult to give you permission to do something special. That person needs to be sure you will behave responsibly and safely.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

Jane Eyre Chapters 36–38

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Have you ever heard the expression “What goes around comes around”? What does this mean? Do you subscribe to this idea? Explain.

Sharing Ideas

Sometimes, a person does something bad or good. Then, later, something equally bad or good, but unrelated, happens to that person. The second event is not a result of the first, but people may view the two events as related. With a partner think of one or more examples of this phenomenon of “cosmic justice” from books, movies, television, daily life, or your imagination.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out what happens when Jane returns to Thornfield.

BACKGROUND

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?

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

countenance [koun ‘ tə nəns] *n.* face; expression

desolate [des ‘ ə lit] *adj.* alone and apart

lachrymose [lak ‘ rə mōs ‘] *adj.* tearful

relapse [rē ‘ laps] *v.* to fall back to an earlier state

vainly [vān ‘ lē] *adv.* without success

Active Reading

Jane Eyre Chapters 36–38

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.

Jane's Comments/Thoughts
1. "I am an independent woman now."
2.
3.
4.
5.

Rochester's Statements to Jane
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Responding

Jane Eyre Chapters 36–38

Personal Response

Did you find the ending of the novel satisfying? Why or why not? Consider your examples from the **Focus Activity** as you answer.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What shock does Jane receive when she returns to Thornfield? What does she learn about its inhabitants?

2. How does Rochester say he felt in Jane's absence? What spiritual change has occurred in Rochester?

3. Do Jane and Rochester still feel the same way about each other? Explain.

Responding

Jane Eyre Chapters 36–38

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. In what way have the roles in Jane and Rochester’s relationship been reversed?

5. Do you think the story has a fairy-tale ending? Or is the situation at the end ironic? (**Situational irony** refers to a strong or surprising contrast between what is expected to happen and what actually happens.)

Literature and Writing

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? In a few paragraphs, 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.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Review Brontë’s description of Jane and Rochester’s reunion and their married life after the wedding in Chapters 37 and 38. Do these chapters paint a picture of the ideal marriage in your opinion? In your group, discuss this question. Cite details from the novel and your own observations of real-life relationships to support your point of view.

Creative Writing

In Chapter 24, Rochester sang a love ballad for Jane. Love songs, both happy and tragic, have been popular for centuries. Compose a song that tells the story of Jane and Rochester’s love. Select a tune you know or make up one of your own. Before you begin writing, take a moment to think about the style and scope of your song. Will it be folk, rock, rap, country-western, or some other style? Will you tell the whole story or focus on one incident or section of the novel? Perform or read your song for the class or a small group.

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Sonnet 116

William Shakespeare

Wedding Day in the Rockies

E. B. White

Before You Read

Focus Question

Why do people in love often feel inspired to write poems?

Background

William Shakespeare (1564–1616) was one of the finest sonnet writers in the English language. Both his poetry and his plays offer readers brilliant imagery as well as tender thoughts about the nature of love. E. B. White (1899–1985) is best known for his essays and for his lifelong connection with the *New Yorker* magazine. White was also a witty, skillful, and humorous poet.

Responding to the Reading

1. In Sonnet 116 by Shakespeare, what is the essential feature of love, according to the speaker? Paraphrase the lines that express this aspect of love.

2. In “Wedding Day in the Rockies” by E. B. White, how can you tell that the author wrote this sonnet to his wife on their wedding anniversary? What do lines 11–12 of White’s sonnet have in common with lines 9–10 of Shakespeare’s sonnet? Do you think the image of love in the final couplet of White’s sonnet is a fitting one? Explain.

3. **Making Connections** How would you compare and contrast the feelings expressed in these two poems with the feelings that Jane and Rochester have for each other?

Performing

In a small group or as a class, hold a poetry reading on the theme of love. Each student should find and share at least one poem about love. Poems might describe a particular relationship, happy or unhappy, or comment on the nature of love. For this activity, choose poems rather than songs. To get ideas, look through general poetry anthologies, anthologies on the theme of love, and collections by individual poets. Rehearse your poem several times until you feel you can read it comfortably and expressively.

from *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Jean Rhys

Before You Read

Focus Question

Think of someone you know or have heard of who has been detained in some place for a reason beyond his or her control. What feelings does a person usually have after being confined in one place for a period of time? Why?

Background

The daughter of a Welsh doctor and a Creole mother, Jean Rhys came to England from the West Indies when she was sixteen years old. Using her active imagination and her extensive knowledge about the mad Creole heiresses of the early nineteenth century, Rhys created a best-selling novel written largely from the perspective of the insane Bertha Rochester. The book is divided into three parts. In the first part, Bertha provides background about her early life. In the second part, Rochester describes his arrival in the West Indies and his arranged marriage. In the third part, Bertha explains the final, awful events at Thornfield Hall.

Responding to the Reading

1. How does Bertha describe Grace Poole? What allows Bertha to be able to escape the attic room repeatedly?

2. How does Bertha remember and describe the episode with her brother? What might this say about her condition?

3. What might the red dress represent? The grey wrapper? Why do you suppose Bertha is always cold?

4. **Making Connections** Consider Bertha's description of the events surrounding the Thornfield fire in light of Brontë's description of the same events in *Jane Eyre*. Does having a different perspective change your attitude about any of the characters involved in the tragedy? Explain.

Art Connection

From any perspective, the fire at Thornfield Hall must have been a visual horror. Using either Bertha's description or the one in Brontë's novel, create your own painting, drawing, poster, or other visual representation to convey the imagery in the selections. Use any medium you choose. Display your art for the class, explaining how your representation and choice of materials relates to the events described in the selections.

A Stranger in a Strange Land

Juliet Barker

Before You Read

Focus Question

What do you know about the northern areas of England, those closer to Scotland and Wales? Is it your impression that these areas have or have not greatly changed since the early nineteenth century? Explain your thoughts.

Background

Part of a much larger history of the fascinating Brontë family, this selection provides a newer and fuller description of the area of Haworth, in Yorkshire, where Patrick Brontë served as minister. Juliet Barker was born in Yorkshire and has lived within a few miles of Haworth all her life.

Responding to the Reading

1. What trades and professions did the people of Haworth engage in at the time the Brontës lived and wrote there?

2. How does Barker describe the landscape of the area around Haworth?

3. In what ways is the Haworth of today different from the Haworth of the early- and mid-nineteenth century? What are the reasons for these changes?

4. **Making Connections** How do you think life in and around Haworth influenced the themes that Charlotte Brontë developed in *Jane Eyre*? Use information from this selection as well as descriptions and events from the novel to explain your answer.

Journal

Imagine that you are keeping a personal journal on a sightseeing trip through modern-day Yorkshire. Write entries for at least one week, recording your personal observations about Haworth. Include conversations with current residents of the town. Be creative as well as descriptive. Use your knowledge of the novel to reflect on what you see.

Signs and Symbols

Vladimir Nabokov

Before You Read

Focus Question

Think of a time when you were faced with a difficult situation that you could not change. Reflect on your attitude at the time and on how your feelings affected your ability to handle the situation.

Background

This short story, written by famous Russian writer and critic Vladimir Nabokov, first appeared in the *New Yorker* magazine in the late 1940s. Having written books of poetry as well as major novels, Nabokov is now considered by many critics to be the foremost post-1917 émigré author.

Responding to the Reading

1. Why do you think the reader never learns the names of the husband and wife in this story? How might this fact relate to the tone of the selection?

2. Why does the wife examine the album of old photographs after her husband has gone to bed?

3. What is the difference between the ways in which the husband and wife seem to want to handle their son's difficult circumstances?

4. What is the significance of the phone call at the end of the story? Why do you suppose Nabokov ends the story with another ring of the telephone?

5. **Making Connections** In portraying the wife in his story, Nabokov says that “after all living did mean accepting the loss of one joy after another, not even joys in her case—mere possibilities of improvement.” Relate this statement to one of the characters in *Jane Eyre*. Using examples from the novel, explain how the quotation describes the character you have chosen.

Literature Groups

In your groups discuss the images in Nabokov's story, particularly those relating to the natural surroundings and to the weather. For example, consider this description: “A few feet away, under a swaying and dripping tree, a tiny half-dead unfledged bird was helplessly twitching in a puddle.” What makes these images powerful? Find other particularly descriptive passages and discuss how they focus the theme of the story.

from The Life of Charlotte Brontë

Elizabeth Gaskell

Before You Read

Focus Question

How does knowing the details of an author's life help you enjoy and interpret the author's work?

Background

Elizabeth Gaskell's biography of Charlotte Brontë, published within two years of her subject's death, set an entirely new standard for literary biography. Considered to be one of the most important books on the author, this impressive biography still enlightens and captivates readers.

Responding to the Reading

1. According to Gaskell, what were Charlotte Brontë's physical, emotional, and social limitations?

2. What intellectual and artistic advantages did Charlotte have over other students at her school?

3. Describe an incident at Roe Head that shows that Charlotte's classmates valued and defended her.

4. **Making Connections** What descriptions of Charlotte and her experiences at Roe Head correspond to Jane Eyre and her experiences at Lowood?

Internet Connection

Use the Internet to find additional interesting information about Charlotte Brontë's life. Determine your favorite Web site and present a short review of that site to your classmates. Include any interesting facts you discover.