

Jane Eyre Study Guide

Chapter Questions

These questions may form the basis for class discussion, homework, or quizzes. However, you should familiarize yourself with these questions even if they are not assigned--they may help you sort out difficulties with the text. You should try to answer the questions in a figurative sense, not just in a literal sense. In other words, look for the deeper meaning behind each question by asking yourself if there is any symbolism involved.

● Preface

1. Analyze the quote "Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion." (vii) In light of what critics of the time had to say about *Jane Eyre*, what is the thrust of Brontë's response?

● Chapter 1

1. What purpose do the descriptive passages from Berwick's *History of British Birds* serve at this stage of the text?
2. What are your impressions of John Reed? What do you make of the abuse that Jane suffers? Is it realistic?

● Chapter 2

1. On page 10, note Jane's thoughts of suicide.
2. *Jane Eyre* was a watershed novel at the time it was written because it blended two styles of novels: the *romantic* novel and the *gothic* novel. According to Webster's *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*, romanticism emphasized content rather than form; encouraged "freedom of treatment," "introspection," and celebrated "nature, the common man, and freedom of the spirit." The same source defines the gothic novel as a type of fiction "characterized by picturesque settings; an atmosphere of mystery, gloom, and terror; supernatural or fantastic occurrences; and violent and macabre events." Where do you see both elements in the novel so far?
3. Jane's fears of the ghost are consistent with her vivid imagination; yet the ghost never appears, and Jane is returned to cruel reality.

● Chapter 3

1. Most readers of today are familiar with the signs of child abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect. While these terms were arguably unknown to Brontë in the mid 19th century, —how does her treatment of Jane reflect what we know about them?

● Chapter 4

1. On page 26, what is unexpected in Jane's answer to how she plans to avoid going to Hell?
2. How does the anecdote of the "little psalm angel" (26) heighten our contempt for Brocklehurst?
3. Why does Bessie begin to treat Jane with kindness at this point in the text? What lesson does Jane learn on how to deal with people she fears? How is this unusual when compared with the depiction of the other children of this time period, such as the "little psalm angel" and the "girls of the school" (278)?

● Chapter 5

1. On page 40, notice "Jane's" first direct address of the "reader."
2. How does Miss Temple fit in with your expectations of her from Brocklehurst's interview with Jane? In fact, how does her character compare to most of the other adult characters encountered in the text so far?

● Chapter 6

1. In this chapter, Jane receives another lesson in strength, this time from Helen Burns. What do you think of Burns' diction and speech? What do you think of her philosophy?

● Chapter 7

1. What do you think of Mr. Brocklehurst's philosophy of education in this chapter?
2. Discuss Brontë's feelings on the "nature of man" (60). Is she being serious or tongue-in-cheek?

● Chapter 8

1. Compare Jane Eyre to other mistreated heroines from children's stories (Cinderella, Rapunzel, Snow White). Knowing that Jane Eyre is the novel that broke many rules about how a mistreated heroine should act, compare and contrast them to Jane.

● Chapter 9

1. Pay attention to the lush descriptions of Miss Temple in chapter 8 and spring at Lowood in chapter 9. How would descriptions like these affect readers in the mid 19th century? How do they affect readers of today?
2. Notice the parallels between life at Lowood in the spring and Jane's new lifestyle. How is this "pathetic fallacy" a form of foreshadowing?

● Chapter 10

1. Read the first paragraph of chapter 10. If Brontë means that she has only related events that are important, what are those important events and how are they important to Jane's development as a character?
2. What do you think of Jane's prayers for a "new servitude"?
3. What can you make of Bessie's character in her differing reactions to Jane's looks and her abilities? What is the effect that Brontë is trying to convey to the reader?
4. Pay attention to the appearance of a mysterious Mr. Eyre.

● Chapter 11

1. What do you make of the first two paragraphs in chapter 11? Analyze this passage with regard to literary theory and the nature of the narrator.
2. What affect does Mrs. Fairfax's description of Rochester have on the reader? How does Brontë achieve this affect?

● Chapter 12

1. Read the passages on pages 100-101. What do you make of them? What is the link between the paragraphs? What opinions does Brontë show here, and how does she direct them through these paragraphs?

● Chapter 13

1. How has Thornfield changed with the arrival of Mr. Rochester? What is the significance of this?
2. On page 110, as well as other places in the text, Brontë makes liberal use of French in her dialogue. What does this say about her audience? How do you compare to that audience?
3. Rochester studies Jane's paintings on pages 115-117. What do you make of the paintings? What does this incident add to the story?

4. Comment on the character and appearance of Rochester. How does he measure up to other romantic heroes?

● Chapter 14

1. When Rochester says he is "paving hell with energy" and that he is "laying down good intentions," he is alluding to an old saying: "The road to Hell is paved with good intentions." This quote has been attributed to Karl Marx, but I think it has been around longer than that. However, this might make an interesting jumping-off point for someone to analyze *Jane Eyre* from a Marxist perspective.
2. This chapter gives more insight on the nature of Rochester through his battle of wits with Jane. What is revealed about Rochester here? What is the outcome of their conversation?

● Chapter 15

1. Why does Jane become more affectionate and tolerant of Adèle, both literally and figuratively?
2. We see that something odd is going on at Thornfield with Rochester's demand that he "like it if he can"(133), the strange laughter, and the attempt on his life.
3. Note at the end of the chapter the change in the relationship between Jane and Rochester.

● Chapter 16

1. The discussion of Miss Blanche Ingram between Jane and Mrs. Fairfax should recall Rochester's opinions of love and jealousy in his romance with Adèle's mother, Céline Varens.
2. What do you make of Jane creating a harsh piece of artwork for herself and a lovely piece of artwork depicting Miss Ingram?

● Chapter 17

1. Beginning with the serving of coffee on page 162, Brontë shifts her narrative into the present tense. Why does she do this, and what is the effect on the reader?
2. How does Brontë transmit the characters of the Ingram ladies successfully to the reader?

● Chapter 18

1. Sometimes Jane's naïveté offers Brontë a chance to satirize the attitudes and actions of aristocracy. In the first full paragraph on page 176, how does Brontë satirize love as seen by the upper class?
2. Comment on the sudden appearance of both Mr. Mason and the old gypsy woman.

● Chapter 19

1. This chapter shows another change in the relationship between Rochester and Jane. Analyze this new stage.
2. Re-read the section beginning with "Here is to your health, ministrant spirit!" (192) until the end of the chapter. What do you make of this passage?

● Chapter 20

1. On page 198, Brontë again changes into the present tense. Why?
2. At this point in the novel, it is very clear that Rochester is deeply involved with some mystery surrounding Grace Poole. At the end of the chapter, who does he initially hint may help him find happiness? When Jane can not respond to

Rochester's hinting, his tone and attitude change immediately. What does this say about Rochester as a character?

Chapter 21

1. On pages 223-4, we are treated to an example of what the Reed sisters have become. How does Jane respond to their personalities. How does Jane compare and contrast to them?
2. Describe the resolution of the relationship between Jane and Mrs. Reed. Is it different from what you expected? Would it have been different from what Brontë's audience would have expected?

Chapter 22

1. Chapter 22 is short and ostensibly deals with Jane's return to Thornwood. What function might this chapter serve in terms of the entire text?
2. Note again the switch in tense on page 231.

Chapter 23

1. Pay attention to Brontë's description of Thornfield in summer at the beginning of the chapter. Notice how it contrasts the events of the rest of the chapter. Notice also the change of weather and the destruction of the chestnut tree. As a reader, what effect should these incidents of "pathetic fallacy" have on you?
2. In Jane's impassioned speech beginning with "I tell you I must go!" (240) you should be able to find pieces of both Bessie and Helen Burns. How do the philosophies of these two influential characters color Jane's words?

Chapter 24

1. This chapter is pure Jane Eyre. How is Jane different than most brides of romance stories? What would Brontë's audience have thought of her behavior?

Chapter 25

1. When Jane regards her wedding gown on page 261, what mood does Brontë establish?
2. Why does Brontë narrate with such a heavy hand when she writes "Stay till he comes, reader; and when I disclose my secret to him, you shall share the confidence." (262)?

Chapter 26

1. What is the irony in Jane wearing "the plain square of blond" veil for her wedding (272)?
2. What do you think of the fact that Jane's uncle and Mr. Mason were business associates?
3. Re-read Jane's recollections of the events leading up to the introduction of Bertha Mason (281). How are these events different from similar events in traditional romantic novels? Why does Brontë "play" the scene this way?

Chapter 27

1. "Reader, I forgave him at the moment on the spot" (284). What is your reaction to this?
2. When Rochester explains the circumstances of marriage to Bertha Mason, how do you respond as a reader? Does Brontë succeed or fail to produce sympathy for this character? How?

3. Compare the symbolism of "(a) wind fresh from Europe" (293) and the "fiery West Indian night" (292). What do these symbols represent? Are they ironic in any sense?
4. On page 302, Jane explains her rationale for not complying with Rochester. Is this in character with the Jane we have come to know? How?

● Chapter 28

1. The suffering that Jane endures is compounded by her belief that she has "no claim to ask" for help (312). How is this philosophy in keeping with her character?
2. As the author of the text, Brontë is the artist who chooses what events happen in the plot (much the same way a painter can choose the composition of a painting, or a sculptor can choose where and how to carve the elements of a sculpture). Why did she choose to create a section where her main character goes through so much pain? Is it appropriate?

● Chapter 29

1. Do a little research. Where do the names Mary, Diana, St. John, and Hannah come from, and what is the significance attached to those names? Compare the meanings of the names to their respective characters in the previous chapter and this one?

● Chapter 30

1. Compare the Rivers family to the Reed family. In what way are they similar? In what way are they foils? Do the names signify anything?

● Chapter 31

1. Jane's feelings toward her backwoods students and the "germs of native excellence, refinement, intelligence (and) kind-feeling" that "are as likely to exist in their hearts as in those of the best-born" (342) are likely to have caused a stir among non-romantics of the period. Why?
2. Why does Jane begin this chapter in the present tense?
3. Jane Eyre is running from an unattainable love. Who else is running as well, and what are the details?

● Chapter 32

1. A good minister is an example to his congregation; followers will learn "truth" by simply observing the daily actions of their pastor. Does St. James Rivers impart any "truths" to Jane?

● Chapter 33

1. In this chapter, the final pieces of the puzzle slip into place. Is this resolution too coincidental or is it satisfactory?

● Chapter 34

1. Characterize the similarities and differences between St. John's offer of marriage and Rochester's. Why does Jane refuse St. John when she is willing to accept a life with him in India? Couldn't she grow to love him? How does her response fit in with what we know about Jane as a character?
2. Hot climates seem to have a special symbolic meaning in the text (note Rochester's discussion of the West Indies). What do you make of it?

● Chapter 35

1. Jane's conversation with Diana (3968), although acceptable and unexceptional to us, would have bordered on the scandalous in Brontë's day. What is it about Jane's viewpoint that would have drawn so much anger?
2. Does Jane's near surrender to St. John Rivers, stopped only by "the voice of Edward Fairfax Rochester" speaks to her "in pain and woe" (401) diminish her strength of character? Why would Brontë have slipped again into the realm of the supernatural if Jane had enough strength in her own convictions?

● Chapter 36

1. In this chapter we learn the fate of Rochester, Bertha Mason, and Thornfield Hall. How do these revelations sit with you, the reader? Did Brontë do a good job of tying up loose ends?

● Chapter 37

1. Notice that Brontë makes a direct jump from the inn at Millcote to Rochester's house at Ferndean. Why does she do this? What effect might she wish to achieve?
2. On page 419, Jane has her own ideas of how to shake Rochester from his gloom. What are they?
3. "To make a love story work you gotta have heart. More important: The audience must believe it's real." This quote by Pat H. Broeske in his article "Save Yourself From *Trouble*" from the January 1995 issue of *Writer's Digest* was his thesis for why some Hollywood love stories work and some don't. Does Jane Eyre work as a love story? Do Jane and Rochester have "heart"? Are we glad to see them back together? What makes their relationship ring true for the reader?

● Chapter 38

1. Brontë ends the novel on a religious note. In fact, she has been building the religious closure since Rochester's admission of prayer in chapter 37. What effect does this have on you as a reader? What effect would it have had on Brontë's audience?
2. If St. John Rivers was such a frigid (and in some ways unpleasant character), why would Brontë chose to end the novel with a reference to him?
3. Note the parallel structure: The novel begins with the antics of John Reed and closes with the antics of St. John Rivers.