Baker Street Readers

Great reads for all ages

Jane Eyre is poor, parentless and plain. Her future looks bleak.

Jane's aunt and cousin detest her. Life at Lowood School is cruel and dangerous. What inner strength can the young Jane find?

Seeking adventure and independence, Jane sets out alone. Is her new master, Mr Rochester, all that he seems? What secret does he keep locked in the third storey, where strange laughter haunts the nights?

In her search for affection, Jane faces horror, cruelty, poverty and temptation. Is she strong enough to do what is right?

Will she ever mean anything more to anybody than poor, plain Jane Eyre?

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"Miniature masterpieces"
- BBC R4, Open Book

JANE EYRE CHARLOTTE BRONTË

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www.bakerstreetreaders.co.uk

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TEACHER'S EDITION ONLY

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THE CHARACTERS



Jane Eyre

Plain, small, and orphaned, Jane is alone in the world. Will she ever find the adventure she seeks and the affection she so desperately needs?



Mrs Reed

Mrs Reed is Jane's cold, cruel aunt. Does she have the power to make Jane miserable for ever?



Helen Burns

Gentle Helen is Jane's best friend. How will she influence Jane? Is she strong enough to survive?



Mr Rochester

Mr Rochester is dark and brooding, but full of fire. Why does he hate his home? What secret does he keep locked away?



Adèle

Adèle is Mr Rochester's charge and Jane's pupil. Will she like her new governess?



Grace Poole

Why does this servant live alone on the third storey? Is it she who haunts the night with savage laughter? What is her deadly secret?



St John Rivers

St John (pronounced 'Sinjun') is handsome and clever. Will he help to heal Jane's broken heart?

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JANE EYRE

'Where are you Jane, you ugly rat? Come out, wherever you are.'

I cowered, cross-legged on the window seat behind the crimson curtain, my book still open in my trembling lap.

My cousin John flung back the curtain. 'There you are! Stand up immediately!'

I obeyed him. 'What do you want?'

'Say, "What do you want, Master Reed?"'

I forced myself to raise my eyes to his face. 'What do you want, Master Reed?'

Four years older than me, with dull eyes and overfed cheeks, John Reed bullied me continuously. Every part of my ten-year-old body feared him. Now, I waited for him to hit me. He struck me hard. I tottered backwards, hitting my head against the door frame. My head bled. 'Stand up, orphan,' shouted John. 'You should be begging in the streets, not living here at mama's expense.'

The fire of rebellion ignited within me. 'You are wicked and cruel,' I shouted.

John ran headlong at me, calling, 'Mama, help me! Jane is in a fury!' We struggled together for a few minutes before my aunt appeared with Bessie, her servant.

'Take her to the red room, and lock her in,' Mrs Reed commanded.



Once the fire in my blood had cooled, I looked around me. My prison was a large, stately room which had been left cold and silent since my uncle died in there nine years ago.

My parents had died of typhus when I was a baby. My uncle had vowed to take care of me, but his own untimely death one year later left this responsibility to his resentful wife. What would he have thought of my imprisonment?

The hours passed. I grew as cold as stone. The eerie light of the autumn evening stirred my

imagination. What if my uncle's ghost appeared now, in this room in which he had died? My heart beat rapidly. My head grew hot. Fear possessed me, and I threw myself against the door. 'Let me out! Let me out!'

My aunt's angry footsteps stopped outside. 'For this outburst,' her cold voice decreed, 'you must stay an extra hour.'

'Oh aunt, have pity,' I sobbed.

She walked away.



Autumn became winter. One cold January morning, summoned to my aunt's presence, I found myself standing before a tall man dressed in black.

'I'm sending you to boarding school,' my aunt told me. 'This is Mr Brocklehurst, the master of the school.'

The man looked down at me with stony eyes. 'You are small and plain,' he observed. 'Are you a good little girl?'

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Shirley and *Villette*. Her sister Emily wrote *Wuthering Heights*, whilst the third sister, Anne, is best known for *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

In writing *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë draws upon some of her own experiences, particularly when describing events at Lowood. Childhood mortality rates were high in Victorian England, although swift advances in medicine would soon improve this.

A woman's place in Victorian society was difficult. It was not easy to become established as a published writer, and the Brontë sisters all used male pseudonyms to improve the chances of their work being published. It was hard to achieve financial security if you were a woman, and for many the only options were a prudent marriage or, like Jane Eyre, work as a governess.

Victorian women were expected to be quiet, content and controlled. Although Jane Eyre behaves appropriately, she expresses her frustration with the limitations placed upon women, compared with the opportunities available to men. Although she is dutiful, she is not submissive. Bertha Mason, perhaps by deliberate contrast, is unable to control her passions. This

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has led many readers to wonder whether Bertha's madness is partly because her freedom to express her true nature has been limited by conventional Victorian attitudes to women.

Finding out more

We recommend the following books, websites and films to gain a greater understanding of Charlotte Brontë and the world she lived in:

Books

- Ann Dinsdale and Simon Warner, *The Brontës at Haworth*, Frances Lincoln, 2006.
- Terry Deary, *Vile Victorians* (Horrible Histories), Scholastic, 1994.
- Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Penguin Modern Classics, 2001. First published in 1966, this is a challenging read in which Jean Rhys tells the story of Antionette (Bertha) Mason before she met Rochester. Rhys blames Bertha's madness upon Rochester's rejection of her and her Creole background.
- Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, many editions available.

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