

Jane Eyre Summary

She was orphaned by her parents as young child, cruelly mistreated by the relatives assigned to care for her, sent to a charity school run by a greedy, abusive headmaster and experienced a typhus epidemic, losing her only friend. All this before the age of 12!

Jane Eyre's early life was an exercise in hardship, but understanding Charlotte Brontë's classic novel doesn't need to be. Here's a teen-friendly refresher course in the plot of this work of literature, as well as SAT vocabulary your teen can use to discern what happens for themselves.

Jane Eyre lives with her cousins, who have been caring for her (if you can call it that) since her parents died of typhus while ministering to the poor. Mrs. Reed and her children are nasty to Jane- continually reminding her of their "charity." One day Jane can no longer take the snide comments from her cousin John, and they get into a fight. Jane of course is blamed and dragged to the "red- room" for a time-out (pretty creepy - it's the room where her Uncle died.) During her punishment, Jane thinks she sees his ghost and passes out in fear.

The family's apothecary, Mr. Lloyd, takes care of her and learns about her cruel treatment in the Reed's home. In a misguided attempt to save poor Jane, he later suggests to Mrs. Reed that Jane be sent away to school. Out of the frying pan for Jane, but...well, you'll see.

Useful vocabulary to describe Jane's early life:

- **Adversity** - Hardship
- **Calamity** - Major misfortune
- **Bereft** - Lacking in something needed or wanted
- **Forlorn** -Lacking companionship
- **Forsaken** - Abandoned

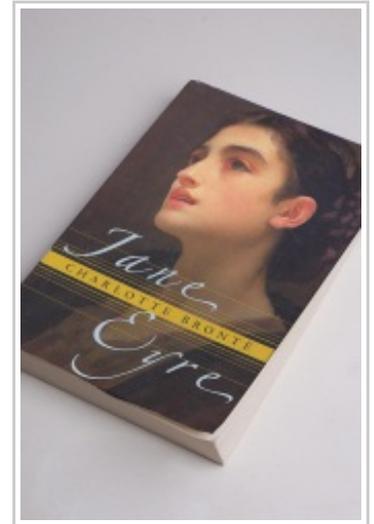
Jane becomes a student of The Lowood School, whose headmaster, Mr. Brocklehurst, has "alternative" ideas about education. In fact, he seems to believe the key to learning is starvation and humiliation. Due to the poor conditions at Lowood, the students are struck down by a typhus epidemic, and Jane's best friend Helen dies. However, the epidemic attracts attention to Brocklehurst's practices, and he is replaced. With the new leadership at Lowood, things improve for Jane for a few years- she receives her education and even becomes a teacher, joining the staff of her alma mater for two years. But she longs to see more of the world – and accepts a position at an estate called Thornfield as a governess.

Useful vocabulary to describe Mr. Brocklehurst's teaching philosophy:

- **Adamant**- forceful; inflexible
- **Odious**- Hateful
- **Degradation**- Deprivation, Poverty
- **Vituperate**- Criticize harshly
- **Berate**- Scold severely

The owner of Thornfield, Mr. Rochester, seems to be absent quite a bit when Jane first arrives, but Jane's student is a sweet little girl named Adele. It seems like things could be looking up for Jane, except for the strange occurrences around Thornfield that no one ever explains, or even seems to notice except Jane.

She wonders...where is the sound of maniacal laughter coming from? Doesn't anyone else hear that?



And if Grace Poole, the seamstress, is truly a drunk and strange, why does she make more money than any of the other members on staff?

These questions plague poor Jane, until she finds herself falling in love with the dark and brooding Mr. Rochester. Their relationship begins with discussions over Adele, but deepens in intensity as their conversations move beyond a professional relationship.

Useful vocabulary in describing Mr. Rochester:

- **Reticent**- Holding back
- **Rash**- Hasty
- **Austere**- Stern
- **Somber**- Dark and gloomy
- **Brooding**- Depressed

Jane believes that Mr. Rochester was going to propose to another woman, but he confesses that he wanted her to think that in order to make her jealous. Then he asks her to marry him! Jane accepts, but as the house begins to prepare for the wedding, strange events continue to happen: most symbolically, Jane's new veil is found ripped in half. Again, no explanation is given. Rochester (Don't you think she would call him by his first name, now?) tells Jane he will explain more when they have been married for a year and a day.

The day of the wedding arrives. The guests have assembled; the bride has walked down the aisle...it's the time for "speak now or forever hold your peace," and someone speaks! A man yells out that Rochester already has a wife, Mrs. Bertha Rochester!

The truth is out, but just where has Mr. Rochester's bride been all these years? Imprisoned on the third floor of Thornfield, kept alive by none other than Grace Poole. Yes, Rochester lied about his wife and kept her prisoner, but it is because she is barking mad! No seriously, barking mad. When Rochester brings his guests to meet his better half, she is down on all fours on the floor making strange animal noises. She immediately springs for Rochester and tries to strangle him with her bare hands.

All of the pieces- mysterious noises, wild laughter, drunken servants, perilous fires- finally fall into place. Jane realizes she cannot be with the man she loves because he is already married and leaves Thornfield.

Jane may be down, but she's not out! She wanders aimlessly, until starving and penniless she finds a family of adult siblings who take her in, and turn out to be her long lost cousins! One of the cousins, St. John, gets her a job teaching at a school. And when her uncle dies and leaves her more money than she could possibly ever dream of, she splits it with her newfound family. She has more reasons for happiness than ever before, but she longs for Rochester...

So much so that on the night that her cousin St. John proposes to her, (I know, I know- but for cousins, they weren't that close.) she believes she hears Rochester voice calling to her, and she leaves for Thornfield at once. When she arrives, she finds that Thornfield has been destroyed by another fire that Bertha started. She has died in the process, but Rochester managed to save the servants- losing his eyesight and one hand in the process. He has gone to Ferndean to recover, and Jane hurries to join him.

In a moment made for tears, she comes to him and because he cannot see her, he believes that he is hearing ghosts or angels. They immediately rekindle their relationship, and Jane finishes her story by saying that she and Edward (finally!) have been happily married for the last 10 years. And as time went on he regained some of his sight, enough so that he was able to see their son when he was born.

Useful vocabulary in describing the ending of Jane Eyre:

- **Resilient**- Recovers easily
- **Autonomous**- Independent
- **Thwarted**- Prevented
- **Aberrant**- Abnormal
- **Incinerate**- Burn to ashes

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