

JANE EYRE

TEACHERS' NOTES

This study guide is aimed at students of GCSE and A-level English and Media. It may also be adapted for use at Key Stage 3. It looks at how the text has been re-created for a modern audience, techniques of narrative and film language , themes and representation. This study guide uses all textual references from the Penguin Classic 1996 edition.

SYNOPSIS

Based on one of the best-loved and most widely read English novels, 'Jane Eyre', starring Academy Award winner William Hurt as the proud and passionate Rochester and Charlotte Gainsbourg as the resilient governess Jane, is a compelling new version of Charlotte Brontë's masterpiece, directed by Franco Zeffirelli.

Director: Franco Zeffirelli

Certificate: PG

Running time: 113 min

INTRODUCTION

'Jane Eyre' is one of the most popular classic texts of all time. Since its publication in 1847 it has never been out of print as a novel and there have been numerous film, stage and television adaptations of the text. What is it about the story of Charlotte Brontë's 'small . . . plain' heroine that has held the fascination of generation after generation and prompted the filmmaker Franco Zeffirelli to re-create the text for a modern audience almost 150 years after its initial release?

During the filming of 'Jane Eyre', the actor William Hurt, who plays Edward Rochester, was asked what relevance the text had to a modern audience. His reply was that classics are always contemporary because they find what he called 'the human proportion'. Although the settings, costumes and representation of character are open to interpretation, the basic themes of 'Jane Eyre', or indeed of any classic work, remain the same throughout the decades.

'Jane Eyre' is the story of a girl who struggles to keep her independent spirit through the problems that society and circumstance conspire to throw against her. It is human nature to empathise with someone who is struggling and the more unfair the circumstances set against them seem to be, the more strongly we want our heroine to win. 'Jane Eyre' is a 'rag to riches' story in many senses.

It is also the story of the relationship between Jane and Mr Rochester and, of course, it is a love story which is especially beset with problems but is universally appealing, irrespective of time or place.

Many other issues are raised by the text which we, as an audience of the 1900's, can identify with. Although we live in a much more relaxed society, groups and individuals still have to face discrimination in the same way that Jane Eyre did.

TASK

Think through the different stages of Jane's life and try to pinpoint, at each stage, what it is that she struggles against. There may be internal or external struggles e.g. at Gateshead: She struggles against a family who do not want her and has an inability to control her feelings.

'Jane Eyre' is the story of a girl who faces problems in many areas of her life; family school, society and relationships. If you were rewriting a modern 'Jane Eyre', how would you update the problems that your heroine faces in these four areas so that they were relevant to life in the 1990's?

- Think of the other issues raised by the book. In what ways are they relevant to your life today?

THE SOCIAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

In order to understand the discrimination which Jane faced and her extraordinary nature I overcoming them, it may help to look at the society in which Charlotte Brontë herself lived. Although she always stated that the only similarity between herself and Jane Eyre was that they were as 'small and plain' as each other, there were indeed many others.

Charlotte Brontë was born in 1816 and brought up in the isolated Yorkshire village of Haworth. There were six children in the family, five girls and one boy, and although they were not poor, money was not plentiful. At that time, the eldest son inherited the family money and property and girls were expected to provide a future husband with a marriage dowry (money from the family). If they were attractive, they might find someone who would overlook their lack of money, but without either attribute, their chances of marrying were slim. Middle class women such as Charlotte and her sisters could not choose domestic service or factory work to earn their living, as their families would disown them.

Girls were not normally educated to any degree except in such accomplishments as drawing and music, designed to increase their attraction to a wealthy husband, however the Reverend Patrick Brontë realised his daughters would have to help support the family finances. He sent them to a school, fifty miles away, for clergymen's daughters, which would educate them to such a standard that they might become teachers, or governess to children from well off families. This school at Cowan Bridge in Lancashire, at which two of Charlotte's sisters died due to poor food and harsh conditions, became the model for Lowood in 'Jane Eyre' and the owner, the Reverend Carus Wilson, exposed as Mr Brocklehurst.

Before the publication of her book at the age of thirty-one, Charlotte spent much of her adult life teaching, and did not find it a pleasurable experience. Working in school involved extremely long hours in poor conditions. Life as a governess was physically less demanding than domestic or factory work, but was very isolating. The governess was looked down on by the family. Charlotte was asked to walk behind the family when going to church during her employment with the Sidgewick family, and yet she was not included by the servants of the house as one of them. Children were not encouraged to respect their governess and so discipline was sometimes impossible.

Charlotte felt very strongly about the plight of women who, like herself, through no fault of their own, were forced into this position. Women in general could only gain recognition through marriage and were expected to content themselves with domesticity. She expresses herself through Jane's voice when she declares that 'women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties'.

'Jane Eyre' was first published under the pseudonym of 'Currer Bell'. Ten years earlier, Charlotte Brontë sent a sample of her work to the Poet Laureate of the time, Robert Southey. His reply gives us an insight into society's opinion of women writers:

*Keswick
March 1837*

Madam,

. . . . Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure she will have for it, even as accomplishment and a recreation. To those duties you have not yet been called, and when you are you will be less eager for celebrity . . .

An extract from 'Charlotte Brontë A Passionate Life'
by Lyndall Gordon published by Vintage 1995

In this day and age it is hard for us to comprehend how individual Charlotte Brontë was in her views. When she made Rochester marry his governess she was seen as rebelling against the 'natural order' that said everyone, especially women, had a place in society and that it was their duty to stay there. She was also condemned for giving Jane such a passionate nature – women were expected to be calm, gentle creatures not given to displays of strong feelings – and critics called the book 'coarse' and 'unsuitable'.

Charlotte replied that 'conventionality is not morality'.

TASK

- What is the Ingram family's opinion of, and attitude towards governesses? How is Blanche's comment about their appearance contemporary to her time?
- In what ways are the differences in social status between Jane and Blanche Ingram highlighted in the film?
- In what ways is Adele a typical little girl of the period?
- In what instances is Mr Rochester's behaviour towards his governess unconventional?
- In which text, book or film does Mr Rochester appear to be the most class conscious? In what ways? Can you suggest why this may be so?
- In what episodes do we see evidence of Jane's passionate nature?
- On what occasions is Jane actively supportive of Mr Rochester? What does this indicate about the unusual nature of their relationship?
- Why do you think women writers were frowned upon at this time?

CHANGES IN THE NARRATIVE

When a novel is adapted for film, events in the narrative and the order in which they occur are often changed. Some reasons for this may be:

to make the film more visually exciting.

to speed up the dramatic action.

to help the audience focus on certain characters and events rather than others.

to emphasise certain character traits or themes which are important to the plot.

because some scenes which work well in the novel, such as those which are mainly dialogue, may not transfer well to film, which is a mainly visual medium.

because time constraints dictate that scenes which are not vital to character or plot development are sometimes omitted.

TASK

- *Consider these changes in the print and film version of 'Jane Eyre' and say why you think the adaptation was made. There may be several reasons for each of these.*

- *The opening sequence of the film shows Jane in the Red Room at Gateshead.*

- *Jane and Helen Burns (not Julia Severn) have their hair cut off on screen, by Mr Brocklehurst himself.*

- ~ *The episode at Thornfield where Mr Rochester dresses up as a gypsy is not included.*

- ~ *Thornfield starts to burn as Jane leaves.*

- ~ *We do not see the episode where Bertha Rochester rips Jane's wedding veil the night before the wedding.*

- ~ *Jane is reunited with Rochester in the ruins of Thornfield rather than at Fearn Dean.*

One major change, which does not appear in the above list, is the reduction of the fourth section of the novel which takes place at Moor House. Jane does not have a relationship with St. John Rivers nor does she gain the family she desires and again, work for a living. How does the omission of these events affect our perception of Jane and of the balance of the text as a whole?

- *Are there other changes? Can you find reasons for these?*

- *Think of other adaptations of 'Jane Eyre' or other novels you have read. Can you say what changes were made to the text and why? Take a novel -you have read and suggest how you would adapt the narrative for the screen.*

ADAPTING LANGUAGE FOR THE SCREEN

When a novel is adapted for the screen, it is inevitable that the nature of the language changes. This is for various reasons, the first of which being the time factors involved. If you consider the length of time it would take you to read 'Jane Eyre' aloud and the *fact* that most films run for between two and three hours, you will begin to appreciate the size of the task a screenwriter faces in producing a screenplay from the original text.

Secondly, the visual nature of film means that descriptions of character and settings are not necessary and that action and reaction can be seen at a glance, thus saving the need for lengthy explanations in print.

Thirdly, and most importantly, when something is seen or heard on screen, we have only one brief opportunity to understand and register the event, so it must be presented clearly. Our sentences are shorter and less complex in speech than in writing, and it is particularly important that dialogue on screen is succinct as there are liable to be visual distractions while the conversation is taking place.

In adapting 'Jane Eyre' the screenwriter, Hugh Whitmore, had the task of picking out the key dialogue and eliminating the 'surrounding' vocabulary in order for us to have a clear, immediate understanding of what is going on. He also found it necessary to alter some of the language so that it sounded natural to a modern audience whilst retaining the style of the period in which 'Jane Eyre' is set.

TASK

Reread the section in the novel where Mr Rochester proposes to Jane in the garden. (pages 282 - 287) ('It's a long way off, Sir...' 'He kissed me repeatedly.') and then read the section of screenplay which relates to this (Appendix A).

Underline the phrases in your novel which appear directly in the screenplay. Why do you think Hugh Whitemore saw it as important to include these?

~ Look at the directions for camera and action (you will find a list of explanations for these at the end of the screenplay, Appendix A). Say how these draw our attention to what the characters are thinking and comment on the actors' intonation. Try to relate these to specific passages from the novel wherever possible.

~ Choose five phrases from the novel which have been rephrased and clarified for the screenplay. Write each version from the two texts alongside each other and comment on the changes.

~ Choose a short section of dialogue between Jane and Mr Rochester and rewrite it in the language that we would use today. What differences in vocabulary and style can you comment on?

~ Look back over the novel extract we have just studied, this time reading pages 280-281 as well. ('Jane, he recommenced...') Consider particularly the sections where Mr Rochester talks to Jane about her leaving and about his new bride Blanche Ingram. Much of this text has been omitted from the screenplay. What is Mr Rochester's manner at these points? In the screenplay, does he appear a more or less sympathetic character to you without this detail?

TASK

- *Choose a short section from the novel, 'Jane Eyre' and adapt it for a screenplay.*

One suggestion for this is the scene where Jane and Helen Burns take tea with Miss Temple. (pages 82-85) ('Resting my head on Helen's shoulder...admitted to hear.')

~ Underline the dialogue you wish to include in your scene. Are there key lines you want to keep exactly as they are?

~ Change the sentences to make them clearer and more to the point. Try to keep the style so that it sounds like Jane and her contemporaries speaking, rather than twentieth century characters.

~ Decide what actions and expressions should be seen on screen so that we understand how the characters are feeling.

Set out your screenplay in the same way as the one you have as an example, with the names of the speakers at the left of the page and the directions for action in capital letters.

~ Picture in your mind what you want the camera to focus on and say whether you would like a long

shot showing the whole room, a medium shot showing two or three figures, or a close-up, showing something in detail such as someone's face, hands or an important object. If you are familiar with film language, you can of course extend your detail of camera directions.

FILM LANGUAGE

In the book of *Jane Eyre*, Jane herself is the narrator. She tells us the story of her journey through life from the perspective of an adult, married woman. One advantage of this style of narration is that we, as an audience, can be privy to a character's thoughts and motives.

Filmmakers occasionally echo this technique by having their principal actor/character talking directly to camera, but far more common is to allow the elements of film language to interpret the character's thoughts and behaviour as Zeffirelli does to memorable effect in the episode where the terrified and bewildered young Jane is locked in the Red Room at Gateshead as punishment for her 'anti-social behaviour'. The scene can be analysed in much the same way as you would critically analyse the language in a passage from the novel. Instead of examining the effect vocabulary, rhythm, imagery and use of linguistic devices, we can look at framing and camera movement, lighting, sound, colour and editing.

•Watch the scene where Jane is locked in the Red Room. We are made aware of her vulnerability as a small child in unfamiliar surroundings and we see her experience terror and bewilderment before her fade into unconsciousness in the closing frames of the scene. How do each of the following convey effectively these emotions and events? (You will need to watch the scene through several times and use the freeze frame facility as you are aiming for a very detailed breakdown of film language rather than just a general impression.)

VISUAL	SOUND
Jane's movements	The use of music
The use of props	The nature of any dialogue and human noise
Movement of the camera	Sound effects
Framing of actors and events (consider point-of-view shots, close-ups, very high or very low angled camera shots repetition of certain shots)	
The use of low key lighting, which casts deep shadows	
The use of colour	
The use of editing (look for speeded up film, quick cutting from frame to frame, fades to black)	

TASK

- *Reread the episode where Jane is locked in the Red Room (Volume one Chapter two in the novel). Analyse the way in which Charlotte Brontë emphasises Jane's terror.*
- *. How does the film language (camera framing, movement, lighting, sound - dialogue and music - editing, costume, setting) emphasise the feeling of unease and apprehension in the scene, where Mason interrupts Jane and Rochester's wedding and the secret of the attic is revealed?*
- *Choose another scene from the novel where tension is high. Describe how you would use the elements of film language to help convey the narrator's frame of mind. You may wish to extend this activity by storyboarding your chosen section of the text.*

REFLECTING A MOOD IN FILM

In film, external features can often be used effectively to indicate the mood of narration and character. Photocopy the following table and complete.

	Impression of dominant colours	Prevailing weather	External/internal features of place	Scenes shot mainly indoors or outdoors
Gateshead				
Lowood				
Thornfield				
Moor House				
Thornfield upon Jane's return				

- *How do you see these elements of film style as reflecting Jane's mood and her treatment and lifestyle at each of these places?*
- *Charlotte Brontë, in the way of many Romantic authors, used the weather as an indication of mood and events in the novel, the most memorable incident being the thunderstorm which splits the horsechestnut tree the night Jane agrees to marry Mr Rochester. What other instances can you think of in the novel?*
- *Look at these two images of Lowood. How does the way in which the people and objects have been placed indicate the mood of the school?*

GOTHIC INFLUENCE

Charlotte Brontë was a reader of Gothic novels in her youth and 'Jane Eyre' shows evidence of this influence. The novel contains elements of this literary style cleverly interwoven with Jane's life so that unusual occurrences retain a realistic trend and references to the spirit world are playful, rather than ominous, in tone. In making his screen version of the text Franco Zeffirelli chose not to exaggerate the Gothic strands. For instance, Thornfield Hall, whilst retaining the 'battlements round the top' and 'long, cold gallery', still looks like the ordinary manor house of the time, where families might live out their lives in relative uneventfulness.

In the 1944 film version of 'Jane Eyre', directed by Robert Stevenson and starring Orson Welles and Joan Fontaine, the use of dramatic sets and low-key lighting (which creates deep, dark shadows) gives the text a very different feel.

TASK

To reflect upon Zeffirelli's 'Jane Eyre', consider how the portrayal of the Gothic has been designed to appeal to an audience of today. Think particularly about the mad wife in the attic.

PACKAGING 'THE TEXT' FOR DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

Each time a text is re-created for a different audience, the people responsible for marketing the product have choices to make about what image of the text they wish to convey.

- As 'Jane Eyre' is very well-known, it has become usual for the synopsis on the book jacket or video to dispense with telling the story. This is a shame, as it has all the exciting elements of a sensational blockbuster novel. Write a synopsis for a new edition of 'Jane Eyre' aiming to attract a teenage audience. For the purpose of this exercise, think particularly about the features of the book you wish to highlight as well as the style of the piece.

SUGGESTED READING

'Charlotte Brontë A Passionate Life'
by Lyndall Gordon
(Vintage 1995)

Casebook Series Charlotte Brontë 'Jane Eyre' and 'Villette'
edited by Miriam Allott
(Macmillan 1973)

'How to Study a Novel'
by John Peck
(Macmillan 1995)

Appendix A

JANE EYRE

Extract from Screenplay by Hugh Whitemore

JANE TO ROCHESTER: It's a long way off

SHE MOVES R.

DOWN TO M. WAIST SHOT ROCHESTER - JANE PASSES F.G. R TO L IN C.U. (SHOULDERS DOWN - SOFT FOCUS).

ROCHESTER TO JANE: No matter. A girl of your sense will not object to the voyage.

JANE (O.S.) TO ROCHESTER: (OVER) Not the voyage, but the distance

M. WAIST SHOT JANE (*SIDE VIEW*) - LOOKS R.

JANE TO ROCHESTER: ... and then the sea is such a barrier.

DOWN TO M. WAIST SHOT ROCHESTER - LOOKS UP L AT O.S. JANE - GLANCES DOWN

ROCHESTER TO JANE: From -- what, Jane?

M. WAIST SHOT JANE (*SIDE VIEW*) - LOOKS R.

JANE TO ROCHESTER: From England, sir.
And from Thornfield.
And...

DOWN TO M. WAIST SHOT ROCHESTER - TURNS, LOOKS UP L AT O.S. JANE.

M. WAIST SHOT JANE (*SIDE VIEW*) - LOOKS R.

DOWN TO M. WAIST SHOT ROCHESTER - LOOKS UP L AT O.S. JANE - LOOKS R.

ROCHESTER TO JANE: Sometimes I have the strangest feeling about you.
Especially when you're near me as you are now.

TRACK IN ON HIM.

It feels as though I had a string...

..tied here, under my left rib, where my heart is.
Tightly knotted to you -- in a similar fashion.
And when you go to Ireland...

M. WAIST SHOT JANE (SIDE VIEW) - LOOKS R.

ROCHESTER (O.S.) TO JANE: with all that distance between us...

M. C.U. ROCHESTER.

ROCHESTER TO JANE: ...I'm afraid that this cord will be snapped...

M. WAIST SHOT JANE (SIDE VIEW) - LOOKS R.

ROCHESTER (O.S.) TO JANE: ...and I shall bleed inwardly.

M. C.U. ROCHESTER - LOOKS UP R. AT O.S. JANE

ROCHESTER TO JANE: But you are sensible. You will forget...

M. WAIST SHOT JANE (SIDE VIEW) - LOOKS R.

JANE TO ROCHESTER: (OVER) Never!

SHE TURNS, LOOKS F.G. R. AT O.S. ROCHESTER

I'll never forget.

M. C.U. ROCHESTER - TURNS TOWARDS

JANE (O.S.) TO ROCHESTER: I wish I'd never been born.

M. WAIST SHOT JANE - LOOKS F.G. R AT O.S. ROCHESTER

JANE TO ROCHESTER: I wish I'd never come to Thornfield.

M.C.U. ROCHESTER - LOOKS UP L. AT O.S. JANE

ROCHESTER TO JANE: (OVER) There are other houses just as fine.

ROCHESTER (Hidden) TO JANE: And so...

HE KISSES HER CHEEK

And so...

JANE TO ROCHESTER: Yes so, sir...
...and yet not so...
...for you're a married man...

M.C.U. JANE L (BACK TO CAMERA), ROCHESTER R.

JANE (Back to camera) TO ROCHESTER: ...or as good as married.

M.C.U. JANE L. ROCHESTER R (SIDE VIEW')

JANE TO ROCHESTER: Let me go.

ROCHESTER TO JANE: (OVER) Jane, be still.

M.C.U. JANE L (BACK TO CAMERA), ROCHESTER R - LOOKS DOWN

ROCHESTER TO JANE: Don't struggle so. You're like a wild bird, clawing
at its cage.

JANE (Back to camera) TO ROCHESTER: I'm no caged bird. I'm a free human being...
...independent -- with a will of my own.

ROCHESTER TO JANE: Then stay.

PAST ROCHESTER R (BACK TO CAMERA) TO M.C.U. JANE.
PAST JANE L (BACK TO CAMERA) TO M.C.U. ROCHESTER

ROCHESTER TO JANE: Stay and marry me

PAST ROCHESTER R (BACK TO CAMERA) TO M.C.U. JANE.

JANE TO ROCHESTER: How dare you make fun of me.

ROCHESTER (Back to camera) TO JANE: (OVER) I mean what I say.

PAST JANE L (BACK TO CAMERA) TO M.C.U. ROCHESTER.

All content in this study guide is Film Education