

A woman with dark, wavy hair is standing in a room, looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. She is wearing a long, white, Victorian-style dress with intricate lace detailing on the collar, sleeves, and bodice. The dress has a high neckline and long, flowing sleeves. In the background, there is a brass bed frame with ornate scrollwork. The room is dimly lit, with a warm, golden light source illuminating the scene.

JANE EYRE

BY Elizabeth Williamson

ADAPTED FROM THE NOVEL BY
Charlotte Brontë

MARCH 23–APRIL 20, 2025



aNoiseWithin

Dear School Partner,

Welcome to A Noise Within Theatre! We are thrilled to welcome you to the 2024-25 season—a season that we like to call **True Grit**—with stories that delve into the depths of tenacity and determination. In *Jane Eyre*, a young, orphaned woman battles with the challenges of womanhood in 19th century England, posing the essential question: *is it possible for a woman to achieve both love and independence at the same time?*

In this study guide, you will find articles, classroom activities, behind-the-scenes interviews, and other exciting materials, all crafted to align with the Common Core and the California VAPA Standards. This study guide can be enjoyed by teachers and students alike, our hope being that teachers and students enjoy it together!

We offer this study guide as a free resource for contextualizing the show and drawing parallels with our modern world, and you can find guides from our past seasons available for download on our website.

We hope this study guide will prepare you to enjoy the show to its fullest potential and to create a lasting memory of a fantastic day at the theatre. We are happy to have you!

Warmly,

A Noise Within Education



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Credits

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Jane Eyre

Major Characters:

Jane Eyre: A young woman who is hired as a governess at Thornfield Hall.

Mr. Edward Fairfax Rochester:
The owner of Thornfield Hall.

Mrs. Fairfax: The housekeeper at Thornfield.

Mr. Richard Mason: A gentleman from the West Indies.

St. John Rivers: A young clergyman.

Minor Characters:

Adèle Varens: Mr. Rochester's young ward, from France.

Mrs. Reed: Jane's aunt, living at Gateshead.

Diana Rivers:
St. John's sister.

Blanche Ingram: The belle of local society near Thornfield.

Colonel Dent: A prominent figure among the upper class near Thornfield.

Bessie: The housemaid at Gateshead.

Lady Ingram and Mary Ingram:
Blanche's mother and sister.

Mr. Carter and Mr. Wood:
The local physician and the rector, both near Thornfield.

John, Leah, and Grace Poole: Servants at Thornfield.

FUN FACTS ABOUT CHARLOTTE BRONTË AND *JANE EYRE*

All three Brontë sisters are remembered for novels that are set on or near the Yorkshire moors in Northern England, where they themselves lived. This wild and desolate landscape seems almost like a character in their novels, rather than merely a setting.

Play Synopsis

Prologue

As the play opens, we see **Jane at her writing desk**. She explains to the audience (whom she addresses collectively as **"Reader,"** as the narrator does in the novel) how she came to be hired as **a governess at Thornfield Hall**. (Throughout the play, Jane alternates between commenting on the action and participating in it, but **she always speaks as the character "Jane,"** never as an actress breaking the fourth wall.)

Act 1

Jane is welcomed to **Thornfield Hall** by **the housekeeper, Mrs. Fairfax**, who introduces Jane to **her pupil, Adele**. Jane learns that Thornfield is owned by **Mr. Edward Rochester**, who is seldom at home. She meets the servants, including the peculiar **Grace Poole**, whose duties are unclear.

Several months pass. One day, while out walking, Jane has **an encounter with a mysterious gentleman**, who has fallen off his horse. Jane assists him, and he rides off. Upon returning to Thornfield, Jane finds the stranger there and learns that **he is Mr. Rochester**. He questions Jane about herself, and as the weeks pass, **Mr. Rochester begins to confide in Jane**, and **they grow closer**.

Many significant events occur: **someone sets fire to Mr. Rochester's room** while he is sleeping, but Jane rescues him (and Mr. Rochester takes her hand for the first time); Mr. Rochester leaves abruptly but returns two weeks later with several houseguests, including **the beautiful Blanche Ingram**; and an unexpected visitor – **Mr. Richard Mason, from the**

Hudson, Debby. Unsplash.com

Play Synopsis *continued*

West Indies—is brutally attacked in the night, forcing Mr. Rochester to rely upon Jane for help, although he does not offer her any explanations.

Jane receives **a summons to visit her dying aunt**, with whom she lived until she was ten and who mistreated her. Mr. Rochester does not want Jane to go, but eventually he agrees.

Act 2 [Spoilers Ahead]

Act 2 begins with **scenes from Jane's unhappy childhood** at **Gateshead**. The time shifts to the present, where Jane sits beside her dying **Aunt Reed**. She gives Jane a three-year-old letter from **Jane's uncle**, now a wealthy man living in Madeira, who **wishes to adopt her, but Aunt Reed had replied that Jane was dead**. Aunt Reed dies later that night, and Jane returns to **Thornfield**. Mr. Rochester allows Jane to believe that he is planning to marry Miss Ingram, but when **Jane declares her love for him**, he confesses that he was only testing her, and that **he loves her and wants to marry her**. Jane accepts, and the two plan to wed.

On the day of the wedding, an unforeseen event occurs that **compels Jane to leave** Thornfield. Eventually she meets a **young clergyman, St. John Rivers**, who takes her to the home he shares with **his sister, Diana**. Jane begins teaching at the local school. Unexpectedly, she receives a large inheritance from her uncle in Madeira, and in accepting it, she learns that St. John and Diana are her cousins. **St. John proposes marriage** to Jane, but **she hears Mr. Rochester's voice** in the air, calling to her. She hastily returns to Thornfield but finds it in **ruins after a fire**. She meets John, who tells her that **Mr. Rochester was grievously injured** in the fire. Jane goes to find him, and **the two are joyfully reunited** once more.

Authors

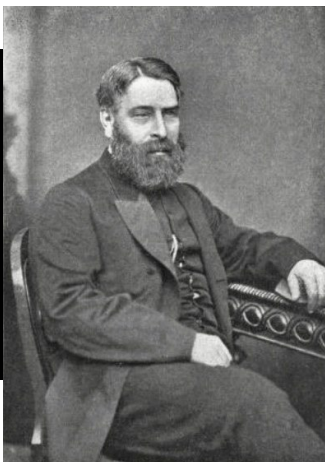
Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) was a British novelist who published under the male pseudonym Currer Bell. She was the third of six children born to Maria (Branwell) Brontë and Patrick Brontë, a clergyman, whose parish was in the village of Hayworth, in Yorkshire, on the edge of the moors (vast, empty plains in Northeast England). After their mother died, the four older sisters were sent to Cowan Bridge School, a “charitable” institution for the daughters of poor clergymen. The school was poorly run, and conditions were unspeakably harsh; Charlotte’s two older sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, contracted tuberculosis there and died. (Charlotte’s descriptions of the horrific Lowood School in the novel *Jane Eyre* are based on Cowan Bridge School.) Charlotte and her younger sister Emily returned home soon after their older sisters died, and for the next several years they were educated at home, along with their younger siblings, Branwell (the only boy) and Anne.



Charlotte Brontë Portrait. GetArchive.net

During the following six years, when they lived together and were tutored at home, Charlotte and her three younger siblings relied almost exclusively upon each other for companionship and entertainment. As a result, they developed a richly creative fantasy life among themselves, building worlds (one named “Glass Town” and another the “country of Angria”) and writing countless tales and stories in numerous elaborate miniature volumes the size of matchboxes that they made entirely by themselves.

As a young woman, Charlotte worked as a teacher and a private governess, but she



FUN FACTS ABOUT

CHARLOTTE BRONTË AND JANE EYRE

Charlotte married at the age of 37, considered at the time (1854) to be a very late age for a first marriage. Her husband, Arthur Bell Nicholls, was her father’s curate (a member of the clergy who assisted the local vicar of a parish).

Arthur Bell Nicholls. victorianweb.org

Authors *continued*

was always anxious and nervous whenever she lived anywhere other than her home in Haworth, and she was always happiest there. Her first novel, *The Professor*, was rejected by multiple publishers, and it did not appear in print until two years after her death. But *Jane Eyre*, published in 1847, was an instant bestseller. Some critics loved and admired it for its forceful storyline and strong heroine, while others reviled it as radical, subversive, and even depraved. But whether they approved of it or not, readers and critics acknowledged its power.

In 1846, at Charlotte's urging, she and her sisters published a volume of poems they had written under the pseudonyms Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. The following year (when *Jane Eyre* was published), Emily (as Ellis Bell) published *Wuthering Heights*, and Anne (as Acton Bell) published *Agnes Gray*, the first of her two novels (the second was *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, published in 1848). All three of Charlotte's younger siblings died within an eight-month period from 1848-1849 (her sisters from tuberculosis and Branwell from tuberculosis and the effects of alcoholism). Charlotte would go on to publish two more novels: *Shirley* (1849) and *Villette* (1853). In 1854 Charlotte married Arthur Bell Nicholls, but she died less than a year later, at the age of 37, from complications of early pregnancy. She was the last of the six Brontë siblings to die.



Elizabeth Williamson (Adaptor) is an award-winning director, producer, dramaturg, and adaptor who is currently the Artistic Director of Geva Theatre in Rochester, N.Y. Williamson is known for her work developing and premiering major new plays and musicals, several of which have won Tony Awards as well as Olivier, Evening Standard, GLAAD, and Drama Desk awards. Williamson has worked on Broadway, in London's West End, Off-Broadway, regionally, and internationally. She also has extensive experience working with Shakespeare and the classics (including her own translations and adaptations) for Hartford Stage, Geva Theatre, the Alley Theatre, and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. (Adapted from <https://elizabethwilliamson.org/>)

Elizabeth Williamson. elizabethwilliams.org

Themes & Motifs

Burns, Christopher. Burn it to the ground. Unsplash.com

Gothic Literature

A literary genre that dates back to eighteenth-century English literature, and that features common themes, including:

- a mystery at the heart of the narrative
- forces of evil (whether human or supernatural)
- a struggling hero or heroine

Later variations include:

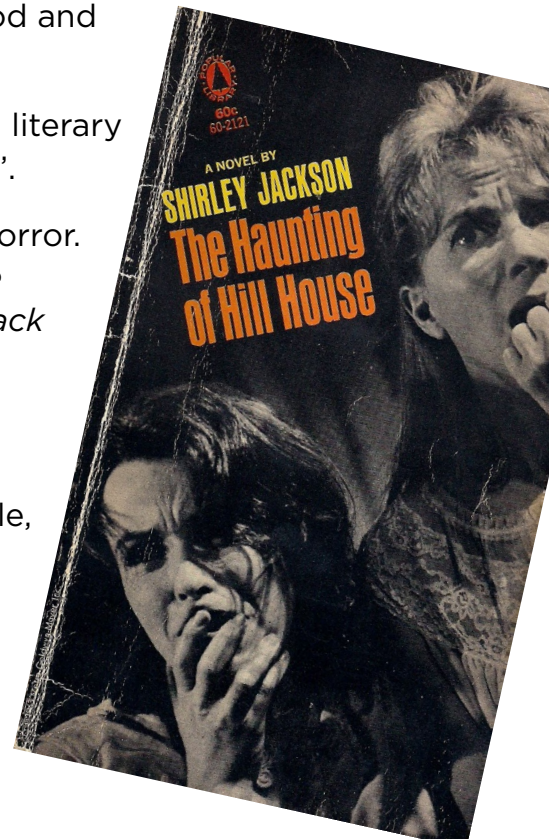
- a dark, forbidding landscape
- a mysterious castle or mansion
- characters who personify various human traits, both good and evil.

Gothic literature often includes elements that are also found in literary works described as “psychological thrillers” and/or “mysteries”.

Edgar Allan Poe is considered the father of American gothic horror. More recent gothic horror novels include Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) and the movie *The Woman in Black* (1983).

Season 2 of the HBO Max series *House of the Dragon* featured a story line involving the character Daemon Targaryen that included many classic elements of gothic fiction: a ruined castle, a morally ambiguous witch-woman, a vision of the future, and hallucinations that in some cases may actually have been happening. (Plus decidedly not-gothic dragons.)

The Haunting of Hill House by Shirley Jackson, front cover. Flickr



Themes & Motifs *continued*

Psychological Thriller

A literary and cinematic genre that depicts a character's attempts to uncover a truth. These plotlines often involve psychological manipulation, mind games, and gaslighting of the central character, who may be somewhat unstable (or who begins to think they are, due to the influence of the manipulator). Familiar examples include classic films such as *Gaslight* (1944), starring Ingrid Bergman and Angela Lansbury; Alfred Hitchcock's *Suspicion* (1941) starring Joan Fontaine (once again!) and Cary Grant; and recent films such as *Fight Club* (1999), starring Brad Pitt, Edward Norton, and Helena Bonham-Carter.

In cinema, a sub-genre of the thriller is so-called *film noir*, which includes many detective dramas (which also overlap with the genre of "Mystery," see below).

Mystery

Probably one of the oldest literary and dramatic genres. A puzzle that is often (but not always) a crime needs to be solved. The literary, dramatic, or cinematic work charts the process by which it is eventually solved.



Principal cast of *Fight Club*. Wikimedia Commons



Alfred Hitchcock by Jack Mitchell. Wikimedia Commons

Themes & Motifs *continued*



Kasey Mahaffy and Erika Soto in *The Glass Menagerie*. 2019. A Noise Within. Photo by Craig Schwartz.

Narrative voice

Jane Eyre is told in the first person, which contributes enormously to its power by allowing the reader to experience Jane's discoveries and her emotions as she herself is experiencing them. At the same time, the narrator is careful to establish that she is writing this supposed autobiography at a distance of some years, which helps render her narrative voice somewhat more objective and therefore more reliable. (See "Memory Play" below.)

Memory Play

Charlotte Brontë's novel is subtitled "An Autobiography." In Elizabeth Williamson's adaptation, the playwright ingeniously preserves the autobiographical quality by having Jane participate in the action but also sometimes comment on it to the audience, addressing the viewers as "Reader," just as Jane does in the novel. (Notably, the character always speaks as Jane, never as an actor who is breaking the fourth wall.) In doing this, Williamson also creates a type of "memory play," which depicts events from the central character's past. A memory play is often framed by commentary spoken by the central character. American Playwright Tennessee Williams (1911-1983) coined the term to describe his play *The Glass Menagerie* (1944). Other examples of memory plays include Aaron Sorkin's 2018 dramatic adaptation of Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive* (1997).

Themes & Motifs *continued*

Feminism

Jane Eyre is a fiercely independent woman with a strong (and appropriate) sense of her own worth. She asserts her values and holds true to them, even when the emotional cost to her of doing so almost destroys her. Moreover, she regards herself as Mr. Rochester's intellectual equal, and she dares to love him when he is of a higher social class. Jane's anger, bordering at times on rage, and her unapologetic expression of it (both as a child and as an adult) were radical in the time that Brontë was writing.

Victorian Social Critique

Several of the plot elements of *Jane Eyre* criticize (overtly or implicitly) certain beliefs and conventions of Victorian society, most notably the harsh treatment that children experienced in schools; the oppressive conventions of marriage; and the hypocrisy shown by many self-proclaimed "good" Christians and spiritual leaders who did not practice what they preached. Other criticisms are expressed more subtly but with equal conviction. The rudeness and disdain shown by the Ingrams towards governesses leaves no doubt as to Charlotte Brontë's views of aristocrats who are contemptuous towards those who work for them and their families (a view that she also expressed in her private letters). For more about Charlotte Brontë's social criticism, see "Jane Eyre's Voice and Charlotte Brontë's Social Critiques."

FUN FACTS ABOUT **CHARLOTTE BRONTË AND *JANE EYRE***

The most recent widely-recognized film adaptation, *Jane Eyre* (2011), features Mia Wasikowska, Michael Fassbender (Magneto in the *X-Men* movie franchise), and Judi Dench.



Mia Wasikowska at Press conference of Damsel, Berlinale. 2018. Michael Fassbender. WonderCon 2012. Wikimedia Commons

Telling the Story: *Jane Eyre* and the Art of Adaptation

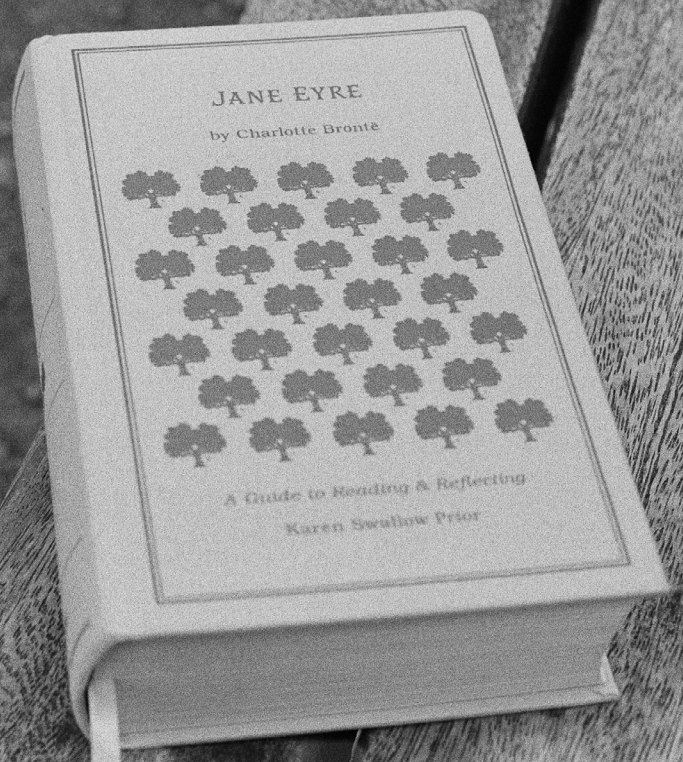
Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* has been adapted multiple times and into multiple formats, beginning with a theatrical adaptation in 1849, just two years after the novel's publication. The novel has been reimagined for the stage; for radio; for silent movies; and for countless movies since the silent era. It has been reimagined as an opera, a musical, and a ballet. It has inspired many television versions, including an episode of "Star Trek: Voyager." It has generated sequels, prequels, and spin-offs. It has been re-told in different historical eras and from the points of view of minor characters (Adele Varens, Bertha Mason, and even Grace Poole). It has been made into a graphic novel and a manga. And of course it has been parodied, including in a 2009 novel *Jane Airhead*, about a teenager obsessed with Brontë's novel; a 2010 novel *Jane Slayre*, in which Jane does everything she does in the original novel -- while also battling vampires; and *Reader, I Murdered Him*, a 2022 novel that follows the adventures of Rochester's ward, Adele. And there have been, in addition, many adaptations and translations into different languages and cultures, to say nothing of the dozens (probably hundreds) of adaptations available on fan fiction sites.

Elizabeth Williamson's play is therefore part of a long tradition of adaptations of *Jane Eyre*, a tradition that shows no signs of slowing down any time soon. Part of the

FUN FACTS ABOUT **CHARLOTTE BRONTË AND *JANE EYRE***

Charlotte Brontë wrote under a male pen name, Currer Bell, because it was nearly impossible for a female author who hoped to be widely read to publish under her own name in nineteenth-century England.

Smith, Hannah. Unsplash.com



Telling the Story: *Jane Eyre* and the Art of Adaptation *continued*

fascination—and the fun—of contemplating these multiple and varied adaptations as they’ve appeared over time is that they allow us to see how the novel has spoken to different generations, cultures, and social movements. Societal values and expectations are constantly evolving, sometimes to their polar opposites, and the adaptations of *Jane Eyre* show us how attitudes towards education, child-rearing, feminism, and marriage have progressed over the roughly 165 years since it was written. It is difficult, for example, to imagine a modern reader who wouldn’t be appalled by the deprivations that Jane endures at Lowood school, yet Charlotte Brontë was in the minority during her own time for criticizing the harshness and the use of corporal punishment that were standard practice in most nineteenth-century schools, whether public or private.

Adaptations may also reveal the biases of the time when they were made, such as the 1943 movie starring Orson Welles, which, though essentially faithful to the novel, features a performance by Joan Fontaine as Jane that may strike modern viewers as too meek for Brontë’s strong-willed heroine. Many recent adaptations attempt to correct (or at least address with greater sensitivity) the ways in which mental illness and issues around race are depicted in the novel. One early and powerful example of a “corrective” adaptation is Jean Rhys’s 1966 novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a prequel that describes Rochester’s marriage to his first wife, Bertha, as seen from her perspective. (Interestingly, Charlotte Brontë herself admitted in a letter to her publisher, W.S. Williams, that she feared she had not paid enough attention to Bertha’s side of the story.)

But if the many adaptations of *Jane Eyre* demonstrate how attitudes and beliefs evolve over time, they also point just as clearly to those aspects of human nature that haven’t changed. The intensity of the love and the psychological connection between Jane and Rochester is as familiar to many twenty-first century readers as it would have been in nineteenth-century Britain, and so is Jane’s passionate anger in the face of injustice, whether towards herself or towards others. And the jealousy that many characters in the novel experience at certain points is completely recognizable for modern readers.

Sometimes when a novel inspires this many adaptations we may wonder why the work has remained so popular. In the case of *Jane Eyre*, however, the answers are clear. Narrative elements that include a passionate, intelligent heroine; an equally passionate yet tormented hero; a chilling gothic mystery; and a deeply moving love story combine to produce a literary work that is truly timeless. And even though some elements of Charlotte Brontë’s extraordinary novel may not have stood the test of time as well as others, that hasn’t diminished the novel’s enduring legacy. After all, that’s what adaptations are for.

Memory Adaptation

ACTIVITY

Objective

Use creative writing exercises to adapt a memory into an original scene.

Step 1: Writing Prompts

Grab a pen and paper! Get comfortable and let your mind wander into your past. Complete the following statements with whatever memories come to mind first:

A time I was proud was _____

A time I was frightened was _____

A time I was surprised was _____

A time I was frustrated was _____

Step 2: Dive Deeper

Look at your four memories. Which memory is the sharpest in your mind? Circle the memory that is the clearest. Write the memory down in full. It should have a beginning, a middle, and an end.

As you write, consider the five senses. How did the memory **feel, sound, smell, taste, and look?**

Step 3: Adapt to Script

Turn your playwrighting glasses on! Take a look at this excerpt from Elizabeth Williamson's adaptation of *Jane Eyre*:

ACT ONE**Thornfield Hall**

We arrive at Thornfield Hall. Mrs Fairfax comes out to greet her, followed by the servant Leah.

MRS FAIRFAX

How do you do, my dear Miss Eyre? I am Mrs. Fairfax. I am afraid you must have had

a tedious drive; come in, come in! You must be cold, come to the fire.

Mrs Fairfax begins to help remove her bonnet and shawl.

JANE

Please don't give yourself so much trouble.

Memory Rewind *continued*

MRS FAIRFAX, *bustling about*

Oh it is no trouble: I daresay your own hands are almost numbed with cold. Leah,
make a little hot negus and cut a sandwich or two.

JANE, *to us*

She treated me like a visitor: this was not like what I had heard of the treatment of governesses; but I knew I must not exult too soon.

To Mrs Fairfax, who is returning with the tray

Shall I have the pleasure of seeing Miss Fairfax tonight?

YOUR TURN!

It is time to transform your written down memory into an original scene. You become your lead character. What other characters are present? What might different characters say? What **stage directions** (the physical actions the actors do, such as: *Mrs. Fairfax begins to help remove her bonnet and shawl.*) are necessary to convey the story?

Jane Eyre's Voice and Charlotte Brontë's Social Critiques

Charlotte Brontë published her best-known work, *Jane Eyre*, as “An Autobiography” that had supposedly been “edited” by Currer Bell, a male name understood to be a pseudonym. Brontë knew that the novel stood no chance of being taken seriously, or even read, if a woman’s name appeared on the title page. The novel was an immediate bestseller, so much so that a second edition followed three months later and a third edition three months after that. Meanwhile, the publisher of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* and Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Gray*—also published under male pseudonyms, Ellis Bell and Acton Bell, respectively—realized that he might be able to boost sales of those novels by implying a connection. Accordingly, he began dropping hints to an admiring public that the author of *Jane Eyre* was also the author of the other two novels.

Charlotte was having none of it, and her Introduction to the third edition of her novel was short and direct. Still writing as Currer Bell, but having dropped the pretense of being merely the “editor” of the work, Charlotte noted pointedly that “my claim to the title of novelist rests on this one work alone,” adding that if “the authorship of other works of fiction has been attributed to me, an honor is awarded where it is not merited; and consequently, denied where it is justly due.” Charlotte, like her sisters, may have bowed to the necessity of writing under a male pen name, but doing so did not mean that she was willing to compromise her feminist principles, let alone her sisterly solidarity, to enrich an unscrupulous male publisher.

Charlotte Brontë was an ardent feminist, and one of the reasons why *Jane Eyre* shocked some early readers was because of its unapologetic feminism, including its depiction of female rage. Jane passionately asserts her own worth, despite being female in a patriarchal society where women had very little freedom and a wife was considered her husband’s property. Jane also defiantly affirms her right to love and be loved by Mr. Rochester, even though she belongs to a lower socioeconomic class than he does, in a

Women’s March on Washington. 2017. Wikimedia Commons



Jane Eyre's Voice and Charlotte Brontë's Social Critiques *continued*

country built upon a rigid social order. Many readers viewed Jane's assertions as highly rebellious, but her insistence upon her intrinsic human value was by no means the only radical element in the novel. Charlotte Brontë's work stands as a powerful piece of social criticism that rivals some of the works of Charles Dickens, the other Victorian novelist who criticized many of the institutions and hypocrisies that characterized nineteenth-century England.

Brontë is arguably even harsher than Dickens in her ruthless skewering of hypocrisy in all its many forms, including among the aristocracy, the clergy, and those who sanctimoniously proclaim their own superiority because they are "good" Christians. Brontë's scathing portrayal of the abuses at Lowood School, which is mismanaged so poorly by the pious-seeming Mr. Brocklehurst that many students, including Jane's dearest friend, die of typhus due to ill treatment and neglect, is all the more searing because it is rooted in Brontë's own lived experience. Her two older sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, who, with Charlotte and Emily, were sent away to Cowan Bridge School, contracted tuberculosis there and were sent home, where they soon died. As moved as we are by the miserable childhoods suffered by Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* or *David Copperfield* (the latter novel, like *Jane Eyre*, told in the first person and modeled on the author's own experience), the raw power behind young Jane's descriptions affects many readers more deeply – perhaps because Jane, as a girl, has even less agency, and much less to look forward to, than David or Oliver. And unlike Dickens, there is no hint of sentimentality in Brontë's writing to soften the sharpness of her criticism.

Jane feels everything deeply, from rage to jealousy to love. She declines St. John Rivers's marriage proposal because she knows that she does not feel for him anything close to the passion that she feels for Mr. Rochester, and she won't settle for less. Charlotte Brontë herself refused two marriage proposals as a young woman before accepting a third and marrying at thirty-seven. ("Reader, I married him.") Given that Jane voices the emotions and beliefs that Brontë wasn't allowed to, the fact that the novel is subtitled "An Autobiography" despite its supposedly being the work of a male author seems like a subtle wink from Brontë. Yes, Brontë concedes the necessity of publishing under a male pseudonym. But she also invites her readers to understand clearly that Jane speaks for Charlotte herself, and for the thousands of other women like Charlotte and her sisters, whose voices she insisted on empowering too – including by standing up to the male publisher who would have exploited her own and silenced others' voices.

The Women Who Wrote

ACTIVITY

Objective

Research famous female writers throughout history who disguised their identity using a pseudonym.

Complete this activity after reading ‘Jane Eyre’s Voice and Charlotte Brontë’s Social Critiques’ on page 16.

Step 1: Group Discussion

Have you ever concealed a part of yourself from another person or group of people? Why? What causes people to hide or conceal their identity?

Step 2: Group Research Project

Throughout history, several famous female writers have concealed their identity and published their work under a pseudonym, sometimes known as a ‘pen name.’

Select one of the following pseudonyms:

“By a Lady”

Ellis Bell

George Eliot

A.M. Barnard

With your group, create a visual presentation that explores the following questions:

1. What is your writer’s true identity?
2. When and where did this writer grow up? How was her childhood?
3. When did she first begin writing? What are some of her most famous novels, poems, or pieces?
4. What compelled your author to use a pseudonym?
5. Did your writer use a pseudonym for their entire career?
6. Do you think her use of a pseudonym was necessary? Would you have used a pseudonym if you were in her position?

Extra Credit:

7. What parallels can be drawn between your writer and the character of Jane Eyre? Do they share anything in common?

Discussion Questions

Before the show:

1. What do you know about **Gothic Literature**? How might the gothic elements influence the atmosphere of the play? How might the play look, feel, and sound because of these gothic elements?
2. *Jane Eyre* was written and will be performed in the **first-person narrative perspective**. What other famous books, plays, or movies do you know that are told through the voice of the protagonist? How does this narrative voice affect your experience as the audience member?

After the show:

3. How does *Jane Eyre* address issues of **social class** and **gender roles** in 19th century England? How does Jane challenge or conform to these societal expectations?
4. *Jane Eyre* is often classified as a **psychological thriller**. In what ways did you observe elements of psychological manipulation, mind games, and gaslighting in the play?
5. **Mr. Rochester** is often considered a morally ambiguous character that maintains many secrets. How do Mr. Rochester's **secrets** impact his relationship with Jane? How do these secrets affect your perception of his character?
6. How does Jane Eyre's journey reflect **feminist themes** of independence and empowerment? What can we learn from Jane about standing up for ourselves today?



Holmberg, Sophia. Unsplash.com

BACKSTAGE CHRONICLES:

A Conversation with the Costume Designer

Coming Soon

Bonus Material

Editions of *Jane Eyre*: Both the Penguin Classics Edition (Edited by Dr. Stevie Davies, 2006) and the Norton Critical Edition (Fourth Edition, edited by Deborah Lutz, 2016) contain helpful notes, background material, and critical essays.

NOTE: Countless adaptations of *Jane Eyre* have been made for film and television. The list below represents a small percentage of these, but we recommend them, and they are readily available.

Film versions

Jane Eyre (2011), starring Mia Wasikowska, Michael Fassbender (Magneto in the *X-Men* movie franchise), and Judi Dench.

Jane Eyre (1996), directed by Franco Zeffirelli, starring Charlotte Gainsbourg, William Hurt, Anna Paquin (as young Jane), and Fiona Shaw (Aunt Petunia in the *Harry Potter* movie franchise).

Jane Eyre (1997), starring Samantha Morton (*Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*) and Ciaran Hinds (*Game of Thrones*).

Jane Eyre (1970), starring George C. Scott and Susannah York.

Jane Eyre (1943), starring Orson Welles and Joan Fontaine, with a young Elizabeth Taylor as Helen Burns. (This older film, with a screenplay by John Houseman and Aldous Huxley, is of historical interest, although it now feels somewhat dated.)

TV series:

Jane Eyre (2006), BBC, starring Ruth Wilson (familiar from many sources, including the HBO/MAX *His Dark Materials* series) and Toby Stephens.

Jane Eyre (1983), BBC, starring Timothy Dalton (a former James Bond) and Zelah Clarke. Probably the most thorough version ever made, this limited TV series consists of eleven episodes and depicts every chapter (if not every event or word) of the novel.

For an extensive (though probably incomplete, nevertheless) list, see the Wikipedia page on “Adaptations of Jane Eyre,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adaptations_of_Jane_Eyre

Bonus Material *continued*

Further Reading

Biographies:

Juliet Barker, *The Brontës: A Life in Letters* (1994).

Lyndall Gordon, *Charlotte Brontë: A Passionate Life* (1996).

Isabel Greenberg, *Glass Town: The Imaginary World of the Brontës* (graphic novel, 2020).

Deborah Lutz, *The Brontë Cabinet: Three Lives in Nine Objects* (2015).

Literary Criticism:

In addition to the essays in the Norton and Penguin critical editions (cited above), see also *The Madwoman in the Attic*, by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. This book by two Harvard professors is considered a classic work of feminist / psychoanalytic criticism about Victorian literature in general and *Jane Eyre* in particular. Although originally written in 1980, the book is still widely read; the most recent edition (2020) includes a new Introduction.

Miscellaneous Resources

For '10 Charming Facts about Jane Eyre,' look here: <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/63272/10-moody-facts-about-jane-eyre>

Two useful sources of historical information are:

<https://blogs.bl.uk/english-and-drama/2021/06/charlotte-bront%C3%ABs-miniature-books.html>

<https://www.bronte.org.uk/about-us>

This link goes to an article in The Guardian and includes photos of the Brontës' home in Haworth: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/apr/25/charlotte-brontes-125m-little-book-of-10-poems-returns-home>

A novel that clearly shows the influence of *Jane Eyre*, although it is not an obvious retelling of that book, is Daphne Du Maurier's 1938 novel *Rebecca*. Despite sharing many plot elements with the earlier work – a young heroine with little experience of the world; a dark, handsome, brooding hero with a terrible secret in his past; a strange and mysterious mansion – Du Maurier's work is in some ways the opposite of Brontë's (for example, the housekeeper in *Rebecca*, named Mrs. Danvers, is a sinister presence, unlike the kindly Mrs.

Bonus Material *continued*

Fairfax). Alfred Hitchcock directed a film version of *Rebecca* in 1940, starring Laurence Olivier and (once again!) Joan Fontaine. A 1997 television series (starring Diana Rigg) and a 2020 Netflix movie (starring Lily James and Armie Hammer) followed.

The singer Stevie Nicks (of Fleetwood Mac) wrote a song inspired by the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_ngePSrPvo

The singer Kate Bush wrote a hit song entitled “Wuthering Heights” (based on the novel by Emily Brontë) in 1978 that is still popular today, including at drag shows (and, judging by the comments on YouTube, with people who were teenagers in the seventies): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrCCdYBmJqE>

For more information about the Yorkshire moors in Northern England, see: <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/152956/the-timeless-moors-of-yorkshire#:~:text=December%2026%2C%202023JPEG,in%20late%20August%20and%20September>

More on Gothic Literature

Popular sub-genres include gothic horror and gothic romance (which many experts believe to have originated with *Jane Eyre*). For good definitions of both, see the New York Public Library blogs <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2018/10/18/brief-history-gothic-horror> and <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2018/10/03/brief-history-gothic-romance>

See the same site for the NY Public Library’s top recommendations for YA gothic romance: <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2018/10/24/ya-gothic-fiction-novels>

ABOUT

A Noise Within

A Noise Within produces classic theatre as an essential means to enrich our community by embracing universal human experiences, expanding personal awareness, and challenging individual perspectives. Our company of resident and guest artists immerses student and general audiences in timeless, epic stories in an intimate setting.

Our most successful art asks our community to question beliefs, focus on relationships, and develop self-awareness. Southern California audiences of all ages and backgrounds build community together while engaging with this most visceral and primal of storytelling techniques. ANW's production of classic theatre includes all plays we believe will be part of our cultural legacy. We interpret these stories through the work of a professional resident company—a group of artists whose work is critical to their community—based on the belief that trust among artists and between artists and audience can only be built through an honest and continuing dialogue.

In its 30-year history, A Noise Within has garnered over 500 awards and commendations, including the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle revered Polly Warfield Award for Excellence and the coveted Margaret Hartford Award for Sustained Excellence.

More than 45,000 individuals attend productions at A Noise Within annually. In addition, the theatre draws over 18,000 student participants to its Education Program. Students benefit from in-classroom workshops, conservatory training, subsidized tickets to matinee and evening performances, post-performance discussions with artists, and free standards-based study guides.



aNoiseWithin
Classic Theatre, Modern Magic

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