

Simply Charlotte Mason presents

Great Book Discussions

- Charlotte Brontë's -

Jane Eyre



By Linda Burklin

Great Book Discussions gives you and your high school student a guide to enjoying and discussing great works of literature. Your student will go beyond traditional literary analysis with open-ended narration questions and deep discussions of character and plot.

Each guide in the *Great Book Discussions* series provides

- An introduction to the work of literature studied
- A suggested reading plan
- Cultural notes to set the context
- Discussion questions and narration prompts on a high school level
- A final exam

Suitable for individual or group use, *Great Book Discussions* makes it simple to add high school literature to your home school or co-op.



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Great Book Discussions: Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre

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Materials Needed

- *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë
- Internet-connected device
- Dictionary
- Book of Centuries (or another timeline tool)
- Book of Mottoes (or a blank journal to begin one)

How to Enjoy Great Book Discussions

You can learn a lot by reading and narrating a great book. You can learn even more when you discuss the story with someone else, because the other person may notice things that you overlooked and offer a different perspective on what you read.

This guide will walk you through both: reading for yourself and discussing what you read. Here's how to use it.

Step 1: Before You Begin the Book

- Familiarize yourself with the Introduction. Read Putting the Work into Context and research Things to Look Up.

Step 2: As You Read Each Section

- Get acquainted with the Characters You Will Meet in These Chapters.
- Use a dictionary to define any unfamiliar Words to Look Up.
- Make entries in your Book of Mottoes.

A Book of Mottoes is a journal in which you can record sentences or passages that you particularly like from your reading. Perhaps you admire how the author worded a particular thought or description, or maybe you appreciate the wisdom one of the characters demonstrated. Keep your journal handy as you read and copy those favorite passages into it.

Step 3: After You Read Each Section

- Answer the Questions about the Characters.
- Complete the Narration Exercise either orally or in writing.

- Discuss with at least one other person the Things to Think About and Discuss. Decide together whether to use some or all of the questions.
- Review the Culture Notes to expand your understanding of the time period in which the book is set.

Step 4: When You Finish the Book

- Think about and answer Some Final Questions either in written form, as a final exam, or as a continuation of your discussion.

Reading Schedule for *Jane Eyre*

The suggested reading schedule below is based on about 30 minutes of reading per day. Feel free to adjust it to a pace that is comfortable for you and allows you to enjoy the story.

The most important thing to notice about the reading schedule is where each section begins and ends. Some sections will be longer than others, as they follow the story and align with how the plot unfolds. You may want to put a small sticky note in your copy of the book to mark where each section ends to remind you to pause in your reading and come back to this guide.

Section 1: Jane at the Reeds', Chapters 1–4

Day 1: Read the Introduction to *Jane Eyre* in this guide, then read *Jane Eyre*, chapters 1–3.

Day 2: Read *Jane Eyre*, chapter 4.

Day 3: Complete the After You Read narration and discussions.

Section 2: Jane at Lowood, Chapters 5–10

Day 4: Read *Jane Eyre*, chapters 5 and 6.

Day 5: Read *Jane Eyre*, chapters 7 and 8.

Day 6: Read *Jane Eyre*, chapters 9 and 10.

Day 7: Complete the After You Read narration and discussions.

Section 3: Jane at Thornfield Hall, Chapters 11–27

Day 8: Read *Jane Eyre*, chapter 11.

Day 9: Read *Jane Eyre*, chapters 12 and 13.

Day 10: Read *Jane Eyre*, chapter 14.

Introduction to *Jane Eyre*

Putting the Work into Context

The author of *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë, was the oldest of the celebrated Brontë sisters of Haworth in Yorkshire, England (the oldest who survived to adulthood). She was born in 1816 and died in 1855 at the age of 38. Her father, Patrick Brontë, was an Irish Anglican clergyman. After her mother's death in 1821, Charlotte and her siblings were cared for by a maternal aunt. In 1824, when Charlotte was only eight, she and three of her sisters were sent to a boarding school for the daughters of clergymen. This proved to be a traumatic experience and inspired the description of Lowood School in the novel *Jane Eyre*. Charlotte believed that the harsh conditions there caused her lifelong physical problems.

After only a year at this school, Charlotte's two older sisters both died of tuberculosis, and Reverend Brontë brought Charlotte and her younger sister Emily home. Here Charlotte, as the oldest surviving sibling, helped care for and educate her younger sisters Emily and Anne and their brother Branwell. The four siblings all had literary ambitions and wrote stories and poems, which they published in their own private magazine.

After more education at Roe Head School in Mirfield, she became a governess (a private tutor) to a succession of wealthy families. Later, she took classes and taught for a while in Belgium before returning to Yorkshire to start a school with her sisters. Unfortunately, the school was unable to attract any students and was soon abandoned.

Charlotte wrote *Jane Eyre* under the pseudonym of "Currer Bell" due to her belief that her work would not be taken seriously if it was known to have been written by a woman. It was a

Section 1

Jane at the Reeds'

Chapters 1–4

As You Read

Read *Jane Eyre*, chapters 1–4. Be sure to watch for any sentences that you'd like to remember. Record them in your Book of Mottoes either as you find them or after you are finished reading.

Characters You Will Meet in These Chapters

- Jane Eyre (as a young girl of ten)
- Aunt Sarah Reed (Jane's mother was the late Mr. Reed's favorite sister)
- Bessie (a servant girl/nursemaid)
- Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed (Jane's cousins)
- Mr. Lloyd (a low-ranking doctor/pharmacist)
- Mr. Brocklehurst (representative of Lowood School)

Words to Look Up

- moreen
- torpid
- turbid

- opprobrium
- poltroon

After You Read

Questions about the Characters

1. What kind of boy is Jane's fourteen-year-old cousin, John? Give some examples to support your opinion. How do you think a child becomes like that?
2. How does Jane react to being attacked by her cousin? Why do you think the situation ended with Jane receiving punishment?
3. How would you describe Aunt Reed as a mother, both to her own children and to Jane? What forms of discipline does she employ?
4. What motivated Jane to speak up to Aunt Reed after being told she is a liar? What do you think of her behavior in this instance?
5. What kind of person is the maid, Bessie? What are her motives in behaving the way she does? What do you think would have happened if she had stood up for Jane or tried to be kinder to her?

Narration Exercise

Describe Jane Eyre as a character, including physical appearance, goals, strengths, and weaknesses.

Things to Think About and Discuss

1. Why did Jane's relatives treat her the way they did? How do you think they justified their treatment of her?
2. Why was Jane so afraid of the red room?

Section 1: *Jane at the Reeds'*

3. Why would the maid tell Jane that if she didn't behave, "something bad might be permitted to come down the chimney and fetch you away?" If you were a young and imaginative child, how would you react to that threat?
4. What do you think Jane needs to learn at this point in the story?
5. "Even for me life had its gleams of sunshine," Jane said at the end of this section. What "gleams of sunshine" did she mention in these first few chapters?
6. Jane described her aunt in part by saying, "under her light eyebrows glimmered an eye devoid of ruth" (chapter 4). Look up the word "ruth" and explain whether you agree with this assessment of Mrs. Reed.

Genre: Gothic Fiction

Literature is often divided up into genres, or categories, to help readers distinguish between the wide range of characteristics in different books. *Jane Eyre* is considered part of the Gothic Fiction genre.

Gothic romances were very popular during the 1800s and still are today. Elements of a Gothic story include

- Setting in a castle, abbey, or grand country mansion
- Something mysterious that creates suspense for the characters and the reader
- Supernatural events (ghosts, for example, are quite popular in this genre)
- Omens, dreams, or visions which always have some significant meaning
- A woman (usually the main character) in distress or danger, often with no one to turn to
- Strong emotions, even tending toward the melodramatic

- A male character who oppresses and controls the female character
- An atmosphere of deep gloom or even horror (this includes weather conditions)

These first few chapters introduce the Gothic elements of this book. As you continue to read this story, you will see more of these elements come into play. The Gothic setting is established in the very first paragraph with its description of the “somber” gloomy weather. Jane is further drawn to desolate and isolated locations as she browses through the book about birds. Another Gothic element is introduced with Jane’s exile to the “red room.” And afterward, even the songs that Bessie sings are gloomy and depressing.