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CHARACTERS

JANE EYRE

WHO IS JANE EYRE?

- Jane Eyre is a poor girl who grows up with her wealthy aunt and cousins at Gateshead.
- She is sent away to Lowood school.
- Jane is employed as a governess at Thornfield Hall, and falls passionately in love with her employer, Mr Rochester.
- Mr Rochester proposes marriage, but on their wedding day it is revealed that he already has a wife, and Jane runs away.
- She is taken in by the Rivers family, whom she later finds are her cousins.
- Jane inherits a fortune.
- St John Rivers proposes marriage, but Jane refuses him.
- Jane returns to Thornfield to find that it has burned down, and Rochester's first wife has died.
- Jane Eyre marries Mr Rochester and they have a son.

JANE'S DEVELOPMENT

At the beginning of the novel Jane is angry, rebellious and hungry for adventure, but as she grows up she learns how to temper her wilder passions so that, unlike many characters in Victorian novels, she is not destroyed by them. Her feelings, especially 'Conscience' and 'Passion' (Chapter XXVII, p. 343), are often given voices of their own when she is suffering some particular anguish and these moments of **personification** help us to understand why she acts as she does. Torn throughout the novel between her true nature and social convention, in the end she is able to resolve this inherent division by marrying for duty and for love. Yet that victory is one that she can only achieve, as in a fairy tale, by apparent coincidence, or good luck.



JANE'S PLACE

Jane Eyre is essentially a young woman who is trying to grow up in a society that does not value her or her skills; she is an outsider. Ultimately she asserts herself, liberates herself and makes herself happy because she believes she has a right to be so. Though impoverished, she can be quite a snob and has to learn that the poor are not just an amorphous mass. As an adult, she is also imbued with the idea that everything foreign is intrinsically unhealthy and immoral. She makes sure that little Adèle learns to be English, or at least as English as possible, given that she is a French Catholic, and she assumes that the Indian climate will kill her. These are the attitudes of her time and of her class.



GRADE BOOSTER A02

Consider how the form of the novel shapes its meaning. Jane is Cinderella-like, or like the heroine of 'The Beauty and the Beast' or 'Bluebeard', so you could argue that it is the complex psychic development that she undergoes and the everyday setting of the novel that manage to make her such an impressive character, rather than her somewhat implausible story.

STUDY FOCUS: IS JANE A RELIABLE NARRATOR?

A02

Jane dominates and controls the **narrative** – incidentally, remember that a first-person narrator is not the author, despite the novel's original subtitle, 'An Autobiography' – and her reactions and feelings always form the focus of attention, even when another character is talking about him or herself. Jane is a credible and realistic character, and because we are privy to her innermost thoughts, we generally take her to be a reliable observer. But, it is important to remember that Jane is narrating events ten years after her marriage. Though she is a child at Gateshead, she tells us about this period as a mature woman, and she herself reminds us of this. Should we question her story at all?

KEY QUOTATIONS: JANE

A01

Key quotation 1:

As Mr Rochester's servants comment at Ferndean in the *Conclusion*, 'If she ben't one o' th' handsomest, ... i' his een she's fair beautiful, onybody may see that.' (p. 518).

Possible interpretations:

- Jane is plain both as a child and as an adult.
- True love transforms the adored person: Edward Rochester sees Jane with his heart.
- Servants see and hear all – here they add credibility to Jane's narrative, though it is she who reports what she overhears.



Key quotation 2:

The last chapter of the novel provides a summary of Jane and Edward Rochester's life together. Its first line is: 'Reader, I married him.' (p. 517).

Possible interpretations:

- This sparse sentence brings the novel to its fairy-tale conclusion.
- The sharp, reductive language reflects both the simplicity of Jane's feelings about the event and their power. Her most deeply felt emotions are always conveyed in the most minimal terms.
- This is an astonishing statement, even though it fulfils both the **protagonist's** and the reader's hopes, as becomes clearer when Jane describes her passing on the news to Mr Rochester's servants.



CRITICAL VIEWPOINT A02

The heart of the novel lies in Jane's descriptions of what is going on in her own mind – we are privy to her innermost thoughts and deepest feelings – and we are therefore drawn into a very close relationship with her. She is not, however, a wholly sympathetic figure.

HOW TO WRITE HIGH-QUALITY RESPONSES

The quality of your writing – how you express your ideas – is vital for getting a higher grade, and **AO1** and **AO2** are specifically about **how** you respond.

FIVE KEY AREAS

The quality of your responses can be broken down into **five** key areas.

1. THE STRUCTURE OF YOUR ANSWER/ESSAY

- First, get **straight to the point in your opening paragraph**. Use a sharp, direct first sentence that deals with a key aspect and then follow up with evidence or detailed reference.
- **Put forward an argument or point of view** (you won't **always** be able to challenge or take issue with the essay question, but generally, where you can, you are more likely to write in an interesting way).
- **Signpost your ideas** with connectives and references, which help the essay flow.
- **Don't repeat points already made**, not even in the conclusion, unless you have something new to say that adds a further dimension.

TARGETING A HIGH GRADE

A01

Here's an example of an opening paragraph that gets straight to the point, addressing the question: **'Learning how to control her passions is necessary for Jane to achieve happiness.'** How do you respond to this viewpoint?

'Then you will not yield?' Rochester asks Jane, 'No' she replies. In choosing to leave Thornfield and that which she 'wholly' loves it appears that Jane has finally learned how to control her passions. With nothing to her name but her reputation, she engages successfully in a 'frantic effort of principle'. But, she is not able to achieve happiness until she returns to her employer, and that requires not only a change in both of their circumstances, but also that she learns to acknowledge her desires.

Immediate focus on task and key words and example from text

2. USE OF TITLES, NAMES, ETC.

This is a simple, but important, tip to stay on the right side of the examiners.

- Make sure that you spell correctly the titles of the texts, chapters, name of authors and so on. Present them correctly, too, with double quotation marks and capitals as appropriate. For example, *'In Chapter I of "Jane Eyre" ...'*.
- Use the **full title**, unless there is a good reason not to (e.g. it's very long).
- Use the terms 'novel' or 'text' rather than 'book' or 'story'. If you use the word 'story', the examiner may think you mean the plot/action rather than the 'text' as a whole.

3. EFFECTIVE QUOTATIONS

Do not 'bolt on' quotations to the points you make. You will get some marks for including them, but examiners will not find your writing very fluent.

The best quotations are:

- Relevant
- Not too long
- Integrated into your argument/sentence.

TARGETING A HIGH GRADE

A01

Here is an example of a quotation successfully embedded in a sentence:

An indication of the Gothic tone that permeates the novel can be seen when Jane hears 'a savage, a sharp' cry in the night coming from 'just above my chamber-ceiling'.

Remember – quotations can be a well-selected set of three or four single words or phrases embedded into a sentence to build a picture or explanation, or they can be longer ones that are explored and picked apart.

4. TECHNIQUES AND TERMINOLOGY

By all means mention literary terms, techniques, conventions or people (for example, 'pathos' or 'Romantic' or 'Martineau') but make sure that you:

- Understand what they mean
- Are able to link them to what you're saying
- Spell them correctly.

5. GENERAL WRITING SKILLS

Try to write in a way that sounds professional and uses standard English. This does not mean that your writing will lack personality – just that it will be authoritative.

- Avoid **colloquial** or everyday expressions such as 'got', 'alright', 'OK' and so on.
- Use terms such as 'convey', 'suggest', 'imply', 'infer' to explain the writer's methods.
- Refer to 'we' when discussing the audience/reader.
- Avoid assertions and generalisations; don't just state a general point of view (*'Rochester is a Byronic hero'*), but analyse closely, with clear evidence and textual detail.

TARGETING A HIGH GRADE

A01

Note the professional approach in this example:

Charlotte Brontë's depiction of Jane Eyre is far more complex and subtle than most representations of middling young women during the Victorian period. Brontë's aim is to capture and express the essence of what is normally hidden, and to enable the reader to understand 'what I then felt!' This, however, is only made clear to the 'Gentle reader', whereas those around Jane are often puzzled by her passionate outbursts and morbid-seeming withdrawals. Her family and friends stand at a distance, but we come to know, and therefore to trust, her absolutely.

GRADE BOOSTER

A02

It is important to remember that *Jane Eyre* is a text created by Charlotte Brontë – thinking about the choices she makes, e.g. her choice of language and plotting, will not only alert you to her methods as an author, but also her intentions, i.e. the effect she seeks to create.

EXAMINER'S TIP

Answer the question set, not the question you'd like to have been asked. Examiners say that often students will be set a question on one character (for example, Rochester) but end up writing almost as much about another (such as Jane herself). Or, they write about one aspect from the question (for example, 'lunacy') but ignore another (such as 'reason'). **Stick to the question, and answer all parts of it.**