

Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë (Published by Dover Publishing)

Approved for use in Advanced Placement Communication Arts IV

Summary

Jane Eyre was published in 1847 and is often considered a fictional autobiography of its author. It follows the fortunes or lack thereof of the lonely and miserable life of the sad, unattractive heroine who begins her life as a girl orphaned without a penny to her name. She is left in the care of her aunt, Mrs. Reed, who treats her in an unfriendly and often cruel manner. This leads to a spirited escape - taking Jane to the charitable Lowood Institution (Charlotte Brontë herself attended the similar Cowan Bridge Institute). This alone was enough for the book to be considered unsuitable for young ladies - even though it never veers from the accepted moral codes of the nineteenth century. After a time with the kind Miss Temple, Jane's beloved teacher, and a fellow orphan, Jane moves to a post teaching the illegitimate child of a Mr. Rochester, a darkly handsome and troubled aristocrat. This unconventional hero-figure finds himself drawn to Jane not for her (plain) face but for her intellect and spark. The story follows the difficulties they face as the truth of Rochester's earlier marriage to a mad Creole woman emerges and Jane attempts to make a new life under the false impression that Rochester is an evil and heartless bigamist.

Jane is ultimately found to be the lost heir of a wealthy uncle. While she makes a new life for herself, she wisely and selflessly shares herself and her new fortune with her long lost family and refuses a loveless but suitable marriage. She refuses to give up on the tortured Mr. Rochester who has redeemed himself by heroically attempting to save his mad wife, in turn, losing his sight and much of his glorious mansion and accompanying wealth. Jane's indomitable spirit and boundless love help restore Mr. Rochester, Jane's new husband, to his former, strong, but less arrogant, self.

Connection to the Curriculum

This novel manifests a two-fold approach to the essential Advanced Placement Literature curriculum: a narrative requiring critical-thinking and analysis and a study in the classic nineteenth century romantic novel. As a book written about an independent, spirited, and poor but liberated female, the writing reveals the story of strength of character in a world where women were to know their places and subjugate themselves to authority in a predominantly man's world where class and wealth were barriers difficult, almost impossible, to overcome. Eyre's story and adherence to classic novel form help the AP reader enter her vision of the world, seemingly closed to those without wealth and position, but filled with possibilities to those who refuse to give in and give up. The multi-twisted themes include changing societal norms, the power of faith, the value of pursuing one's goals in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, the changing roles of women in society, and the value of strong moral actions when faced with monumental temptations and desires.

The novel also explores the diverse paths a person's life may take in determining self-actualization and awareness. This novel contrasts from *Wuthering Heights* in that it shows the emergence of feminine self-power from the limits of unwritten nineteenth century English societal rules, including those of wealth, power, self-determination, and advancement in contrast to the prevailing societal entrapment, especially of women, in the nineteenth century. The additional bonus in studying *Jane Eyre* through close readings allows the AP student to study the differences in vocabulary, characterization, styles, and literary techniques employed by the Romantic writers of the nineteenth century. Students will read one of the most influential female writers of the nineteenth century.

Standards

Course Objectives (Benchmarks)

Reading: 1.2- The students read fluently. 1.3- The students expand vocabulary. 1.4- The students comprehend a variety of texts.

Literature: 2.1-The students use literary concepts to interpret and respond to text.

Writing: 3- The students write effectively for a variety of audiences, purposes, and contexts.

Possible Skills Taught (Indicators)

Reading:

1.4.7- The student identifies characteristics of narrative texts.

1.4.9- The student uses prior knowledge, content, and text type features to make, revise, and confirm predictions.

1.4.10- The student generates and responds logically to literal, inferential, evaluative, and critical thinking questions before, during and after reading the text.

1.4.17- The student analyzes and evaluates how an author's style and use of literary devices works together to achieve his or her purpose for writing text.

Literature:

2.1.1- The student identifies and describes different types of characters and analyzes the development of characters.

2.1.2- The student analyzes the historical, social, and cultural contextual aspects of the setting and their influence on characters and events in the story or literary text.

2.1.5- The student identifies, analyzes, and evaluates the use of literary devices in a text.

A Note on the Text: (The

best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

Brontë's Victorian approach to writing enables her to handle mature topics (love, mental illness, mistreatment) in a conservative manner.

AP Connections

For AP IV, the novel provides a link to the canon of classic fiction essential not only for the AP IV test that incorporates questions based upon classics, but also essential for the college-bound reader. Close readings that encompass the heart of the AP IV test provide insight into the literary strategies (tone, syntax, diction, style, characterization, plot, vocabulary) of Charlotte Brontë's narrative.

Additional Unit Design Connections

Coming soon